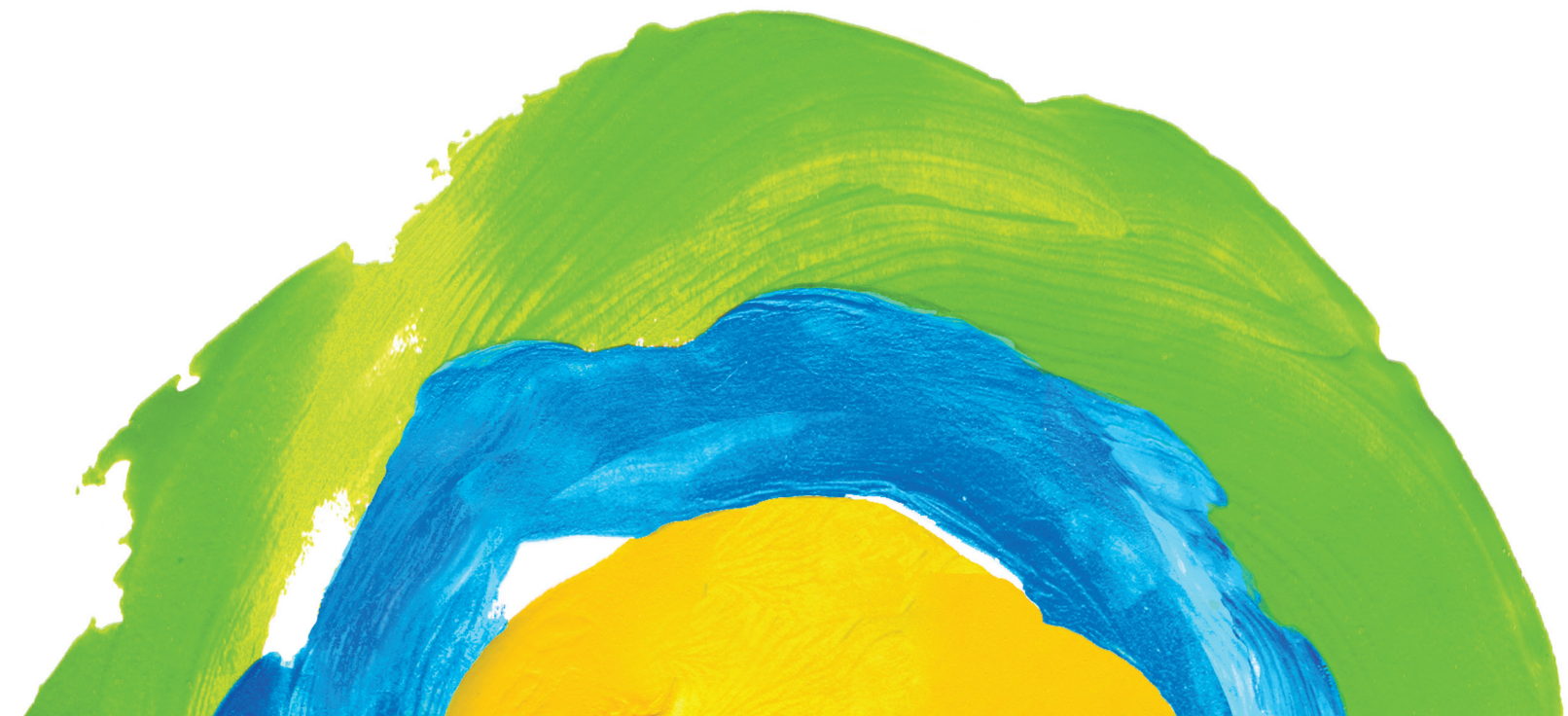


# Service Corps to Social Impact Career

A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers

*by*

**Amy Potthast**



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Published in 2009 by Action Without Borders ([www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org)).

The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealists.org/servicecompanion](http://www.idealists.org/servicecompanion).



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# INTRODUCTION



## Getting started

### A quick introduction to this book

#### Introduction Overview

The Introduction contains brief discussions of the following topics:

- What makes a corps member's transition unique? (page 2)
- Whom is this *Companion* for? (pages 2-3)
- How is this *Companion* structured? (page 3)
- Archetypal corps members (pages 4-5)
- How this *Companion* relates to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*, including the table of contents for these free books (pages 5-6)
- About the *Companion's* author and organization (page 7)

Your participation in national or international service gives you an incredible starting point for a career and life with social impact. This is true whether you are a recent high school or college graduate, or an encore professional. For people early in their careers, service also offers an opportunity to build hands-on experience before applying to college or graduate school.

The beauty of many service corps is that they effectively introduce you and other participants to public service roles while also providing you with the skills you need to succeed:

- With very little full-time work experience, recent college graduates may accept positions during their service term with nonprofit organizations, schools, or government agencies that offer a great deal of responsibility, autonomy, challenges, and opportunities for training and professional growth.
- People with years of professional experience can take on new positions in nonprofit and government agencies that immediately utilize their skill sets while allowing them to gain experience from a different perspective.



No matter what stage of life you were in as you started your term of service, this book aims to help you parlay your service experience into a social impact career.

Pathways to public service careers are often unclear. Because you are responding to a calling that comes from within you—that commits you to strengthening your community and the world—your career path isn't easy to predict or even to plan:

- People you meet may inspire you to new heights.
- You may discover your own solution to an intractable social ill, start a new program or organization, and never look for a job again.
- Opportunities may arise that impel you to act in innovative and unplanned ways.

Because your career path is a journey of discovery—and as unique in the world as your own thumbprint—the advice in *Service Corps to Social Impact Career – A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* aims to prepare you for opportunities to make a tangible, positive impact in the world. This *Companion* also aims to position you to engage the people who will support and inspire you as you grow.

## What makes a corps member's transition unique?

As a service corps participant, your transition to a career or school is unique for several reasons.

Right now you have an awesome opportunity to become part of the next wave of public service leaders. Projections indicate that from 2006 to 2016, U.S. nonprofits will need to attract and develop 640,000 new senior managers, or 2.4 times 2006 levels.<sup>1</sup> By learning career transition skills during your term of service, you can plan your professional growth and prepare to assume leadership roles throughout your career.

Moreover, the relatively short-term nature of your experience means that you can spend the entire term engaged in the transition to your post-service career. As you develop new skill sets and networks, you'll also need to learn how to leverage these quickly for the job or school search.

A term of service may be brief, but it's *incredibly powerful*. Learning how to explain the difference between a service corps experience and any other one- or two-year role is crucial in some settings, as is telling the story of your experience.

## Whom is this *Companion* for?

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career* has been written for prospective, current, and former participants of a wide range of service corps like Peace Corps, AmeriCorps,



**Right now you have an awesome opportunity to become part of the next wave of public service leaders.”**

<sup>1</sup> The Bridgespan Group (Thomas J. Tierney) “The Nonprofit Sector’s Leadership Deficit” March 2006. Available at: <http://www.bridgespan.org/nonprofit-leadership-deficit.aspx>





Teach For America, City Year, Avodah, Jesuit Volunteers, HealthCorps, Mississippi Teacher Corps, Volunteer Service Organisation, Atlas Corps, Indicorps, and many more. It's meant for people who want to use their service experience as a building block to their next steps, whether that's a social impact career or a related academic pursuit.

This *Companion* does not offer preparation for other options you may have when you leave your term. For example, it's not intended to help with retirement issues, staying home to raise a family, or taking time off to travel abroad—although some of the insights contained may be useful in these pursuits, too.

Also, this *Companion* primarily focuses on the experience of U.S. residents serving domestically or internationally. Some of the advice may be useful to service corps participants from other countries.

Different programs choose different terms to refer to their participants, such as “volunteer,” “corps member,” “member,” “coordinator,” “fellow,” or “teacher.” This book usually uses the terms “participant” and “corps member” to refer to the people who have committed to a term of service.

## How is this *Companion* structured?

Besides this introduction and a conclusion, this *Companion* has three main parts:

**Part One:** What you can do during the term of service to better position yourself for next steps. Next steps can include transitions to a career (searching for a salaried job) or educational setting (going on to school for an associates, bachelors, or graduate degree). Part One discusses discerning your professional calling, networking, building skills, and documenting achievements—all within the context of a term of service.

**Part Two:** Help for making the transition. This part covers the emotional and logistical challenges of your transitions and ways to overcome them. It also helps you effectively translate your service experience for prospective employers and admissions counselors, as well as provides tips for how to present your service experience on paper. If you have only just found this *Companion* and you are finished with your term, you'll find tips for getting yourself up to speed in this part as well. Part Two spells out alternatives to the nonprofit sector as a career choice, including government and business sector careers, as well as starting your own organization and going to school.

**Part Three:** Professional development after your transition, and staying in the loop as an alumnus. This part outlines some of the adjustments you'll make in a new job, as well as opportunities for lifelong career development.



## Archetypal corps members

We've found a few (fictional!) people to take this journey with you. We hope that the archetypal corps members outlined below help to illustrate some of the successes, challenges, and opportunities you will encounter throughout your own transitions.



### ACE'S STORY

Ace, 19, is the proud father of a pre-schooler and recently earned his GED in a program that supports formerly incarcerated and other court-involved youth. In high school he was involved in drugs and was considered a nonviolent juvenile offender. He's started a term of service with a conservation corps near his home in New Orleans, LA, greening buildings and homes. Ace is considering college, but is also interested in other opportunities that don't require a college education for the immediate future. Participating in his service corps makes him feel proud to be identified with something really positive for the community.



### BEA'S STORY

Bea, 22, just graduated from college in Western North Carolina and has moved an hour away to do a term of indirect service, connecting public schools with local organic farmers in Asheville. She is not sure what her plans are after her term is up, but she knows that sustainable agriculture and education are the issues she cares about most. In college, Bea majored in public health and led a student organization that procured an acre of campus to build a new community garden for students, faculty, and town residents to use. She has spent several spring breaks volunteering for Habitat for Humanity as well.



### CESAR'S STORY

Cesar, 33, participates in a faith-based direct-service program, teaching English, life skills, and U.S. citizenship test content to immigrants in a community center in a small city in Massachusetts, far from where he grew up near Tampa, FL. He is considering staying in his new city post-service. Before his term of service, he sold cell phones at a kiosk in a Florida mall, volunteered for a political campaign, and occasionally helped out at a community radio station. He majored in communications in college.

### DIRECT AND INDIRECT SERVICE

Direct service means working directly with an organization's constituents or clients, or doing physical labor as part of one's service. For example, tutoring children; helping low-income people access community services; hanging dry wall in a new house; or building trails.

Indirect service means working on an organization's programs to strengthen its capacity. Examples include developing a volunteer program that recruits and trains school-based tutors; writing grant proposals to fund a community center for low-income adults; soliciting in-kind donations of building materials for a new house; or coordinating the work of trail-building crews.





### DEENA'S STORY

Deena, 47, is in her second year of international service in Ecuador, helping women apply for micro-loans and start up small businesses. She spends most of her time traveling to rural villages without much access to telephones, the internet, or news from outside the local community. She plans to stay abroad once she's ended her term. Before leaving the United States, Deena ran her own bakery for over a decade and volunteered for a local Girl Scouts troop. She graduated from college with a degree in nursing.



### ED'S STORY

Ed, 70 and retired, also serves internationally, teaching English in a middle school in a small city in Southwestern China. A lifelong resident of Pittsburgh, Ed will move to Portland, OR for the first time when he returns to the United States, to be near his adult daughter. Before volunteering abroad, Ed taught high school English for most of his adult life, where he also coached the school's basketball team. He is a Vietnam veteran and after leaving the Service, he studied education and literature in college.

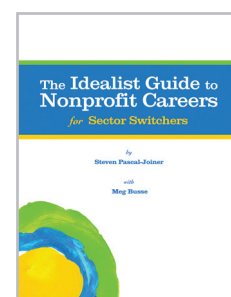
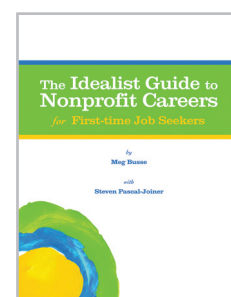
## How this Companion relates to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career* is designed to serve as a targeted supplemental companion to either of the free career guides published by Idealist.org in 2008:

*The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for First-time Job Seekers* by Meg Busse is primarily geared toward emerging professionals seeking their first position in the sector; the intended audience includes college students, recent graduates, and people entering the workforce for the first time. Little or no prior paid work experience is assumed. ([www.idealism.org/beginacareer](http://www.idealism.org/beginacareer))

*The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for Sector Switchers* by Steven Joiner is conceived for transitioning professionals pursuing new career options in the nonprofit sector; the intended audience includes mid-career professionals (from the for-profit or public sectors), encore careerists, and anyone else who has several years of experience under their belt. ([www.idealism.org/sectorswitcher](http://www.idealism.org/sectorswitcher))

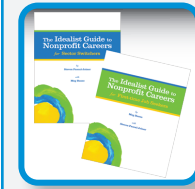
While this *Companion* presents career transition advice within the specific frame of the service corps experience and stands on its own as a book, it frequently makes



reference to relevant discussions and applicable activities contained in the aforementioned *Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*. These references point you toward additional guidance, insights, and resources that can enhance your understanding of various aspects of the career transition. Each reference to content in the *Idealist Guides* is accompanied by the chapter and/or page number for both versions, enabling you to access only the sections of an *Idealist Guide* that you need.

When you want to read a part of an *Idealist Guide* referenced in this *Companion*, you don't have to read both *Idealist Guides*—just choose the version you identify with more closely and download the relevant chapters as PDFs (they're all completely free). If you prefer, you can also download the complete version of either *Idealist Guide* as a PDF (also free).

Although they contain uniquely calibrated information for their intended audiences, both of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* follow the same basic structure, detailed in the table of contents below.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Throughout  
this book,

you'll see these tie-ins to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*. By following the links, you'll be taken to a page on the Idealist.org website where you can download the chapter as a free PDF.

**Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers  
for First-time Job Seekers**  
[www.idealism.org/beginacareer](http://www.idealism.org/beginacareer)

**Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers  
for Sector Switchers**  
[www.idealism.org/sectorswitcher](http://www.idealism.org/sectorswitcher)

## Table of contents for The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers

<b>Introduction</b>	Opening thoughts: Why do you want to work in the nonprofit sector anyway?
<b>Chapter One</b>	What exactly is a nonprofit? (The answer will surprise you)
<b>Chapter Two</b>	Balancing act: The psychology of the job search
<b>Chapter Three</b>	Self and career assessment: The foundation of a successful job search and career
<b>Chapter Four</b>	Networking: Is it really all about who you know? Yes.
<b>Chapter Five</b>	Become a stronger candidate: Nine ways to get out and involved
<b>Chapter Six</b>	Tools for the job search: Researching <i>all</i> the opportunities in your chosen location
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	Does your work work for you? Evaluating organizational culture
<b>Chapter Eight</b>	Presenting yourself on paper: Resumes and cover letters
<b>Chapter Nine</b>	Presenting yourself in person: Interviews and first impressions
<b>Chapter Ten</b>	Closing the deal: Understanding benefits and the art of negotiation
<b>Chapter Eleven</b>	Staying ready: A career search doesn't end when you get a job
<b>Chapter Twelve</b>	Nonprofit hiring practices: The challenges of the job market
<b>Chapter Thirteen</b>	It's not what you think: Dispelling some misconceptions about the nonprofit world
<b>Chapter Fourteen</b>	Starting your own nonprofit: Five tips, one warning, and eleven first steps
<b>Conclusion</b>	Closing thoughts: Know yourself, the sector, and the points of synergy
<b>Appendix One</b>	Nonprofitspeak 101: A primer on the nonprofit sector's vocabulary



## Amy Potthast, author of *Service Corps to Social Impact Career*

Amy Potthast, Director of Idealist's Service Initiatives, has served as a Peace Corps volunteer and trainer, an AmeriCorps member, and an AmeriCorps VISTA team leader. At Idealist, Amy has spearheaded the development of new resources, trainings, and events to promote public service careers and graduate education.

Amy has also helped develop and implement the Institute on Public Service Careers (IPSC), recipient of the 2006 National Association of Colleges and Employers/Chevron Award for innovative programming for undergraduate career service professionals. Also in 2006, she developed content for *What's Next: Life After Your Service Year*, the career transitions website for AmeriCorps VISTA (<http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/whatsnext/index.shtml>). In 2007, she earned the Building Bridges Award from the National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals for developing the Idealist.org Graduate Degree Fairs for the Public Good. In 2008, she founded The New Service blog ([www.idealism.org/thenewservice](http://www.idealism.org/thenewservice)). Her work has increasingly focused on highlighting pathways to service corps participation as preparation for school and social impact careers.

## Idealist.org, the organization behind this book

[Idealist.org](http://www.idealism.org) is an interactive website where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, locate opportunities and supporters, and take steps to turn their good intentions into action. Run by the nonprofit Action Without Borders, Idealist creates opportunities for collaboration among individuals and organizations around the world, receiving over 60,000 unique visitors every day. It is one of the leading resources for nonprofit and public service-oriented people, with thousands of job openings, volunteer opportunities, internships, and events posted by more than 86,000 organizations worldwide.

Beyond the web, Idealist also runs face-to-face events and trainings. Idealist workshops build the capacity of nonprofit human resource professionals, volunteer resource managers, career counselors, job seekers, and others. Since 2004, Idealist has also organized over 120 Nonprofit Career Fairs, 60 Graduate Degree Fairs for the Public Good, and four Global Volunteering Fairs—attracting more than 10,000 organizations and 100,000 individuals from around the world.

Idealist is positioned to play an increasingly crucial role in connecting people to the vast number of diverse citizen service opportunities like AmeriCorps and Peace Corps. Idealist helps people find service opportunities that will strengthen their professional skills while giving them experience contributing to high-need communities throughout the world. Once established in a corps, corps members find career transitions support on Idealist, to help them move on to further education and careers.



## Credits

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Special thanks to our editorial readers—**Erin Barnhart, Meg Busse, Jung Fitzpatrick, Celeste Hamilton, Hannah Kane, Leah Nusse, Katrina Mathis, Steven Joiner**, and **Stacie West**—who generously contributed their insights, anecdotes, and proofreading powers. Thanks also go to the **entire staff at Idealist.org** for their support and collaboration in all of this work.

This book incorporates elements of the design work of **Kerstin Vogdes** of **kvdesign** ([www.kvdesign.net](http://www.kvdesign.net)), who created the original templates for *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

## Author's acknowledgments

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## SUMMARY

At the end of each part of this book, you'll find a **summary** of the main points in that part. You'll also find handy **page number cues** to point you to the precise pages where you can read more about a particular topic.

## Disclaimer

The publisher and author have offered their best efforts and insights in this book's preparation, but neither the publisher nor the author make any representations or warranties regarding the accuracy or completeness of its content. The advice and options stated herein are not guaranteed or warranted to result in any particular outcomes, and may not be applicable or appropriate for every individual. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for any damages—commercial, professional, or otherwise—resulting from the use of this book.

## You are here

- This is the **Introduction**. The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealistservice.companion](http://www.idealistservice.companion).

### About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

**Action Without Borders** is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. [Idealist.org](http://Idealist.org), a project of Action Without Borders, is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, find opportunities and supporters, and turn their good intentions into action.

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career – A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* by Amy Potthast is a product of Action Without Borders' Careers and Service Team based in Portland, OR. This team works to support individuals and organizations with graduate education options; HR and volunteer management resources; and job, internship, and domestic and global volunteer opportunities. Published in 2009 by Action Without Borders.



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# PART ONE



## Before your transition

### Setting yourself up for success during your term

#### Part One Overview

Part One is particularly valuable for readers who are still in their service corps. It discusses the following topics:

- **Section one: Discerning your professional calling** (pages 11-17)
  - \* Includes discussions of why discernment matters to service corps participants (page 12), “careering” toward your future (pages 12-13), and tools for discernment (pages 13-15)
- **Section two: Building skills** (pages 18-31)
  - \* Includes discussions of identifying the skills you need (page 18), practicing basic work skills (pages 19-21), keeping track of the skills you need to acquire (pages 22-23), ways to learn new skills (pages 23-27), alternative avenues for training (pages 27-28), and making the most of a bad workshop (pages 28-29)
- **Section three: Building relationships** (pages 31-43)
  - \* Includes discussions of building a network of community partners (pages 32-36), more ways to bolster your professional network (page 37), and alternative and long-distance networking (pages 38-43)
- **Section four: Documenting your successes** (pages 43-47)
  - \* Includes discussions of documenting the facts of your service with statistics (pages 44-45), documenting the artifacts of your service in a portfolio (pages 45-46), and hanging on to your documentation (pages 46-47)

Some corps members prefer to wait until the end of their term to turn their attention to career transitions. Other corps members spend a good part of their service term positioning themselves for their next steps—applying for school, or looking for jobs. Finally, other corps members have a hard time thinking of their service experience and their career path in the same category at all—for them, service is a spiritual calling or an act of social justice—not something to use for their personal advantage.

However you feel about the relationship between your corps experience and your



career, you can take steps that not only help you engage your community more effectively during your term, but also prepare you for a positive and successful transition down the road regardless of the path you take—continuing in a service experience, pursuing higher education, or finding a job.

Part One of this book highlights several of these opportunities—taking time to discern what you'd like to do next; building relationships with people who can influence, support, and guide your choices; building skills you need to succeed now and later; and documenting your achievements.

When most service corps talk about “life after” the corps, the focus is on career search skills, like writing a strong and relevant resume and preparing for an interview. While these skills are crucial, you can afford to wait a bit longer to focus on those—these topics are covered in [Part Two](#) of this *Companion* as relates specifically to corps members, and throughout *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* for a more thorough treatment of these topics.

## Section one: Discerning your professional calling

This section focuses on the many ways you can figure out what you want to do next, given that you are meeting people who move you to rethink your priorities, exposing yourself to so many new career options, learning new skill sets that open the door to new professional roles you can play, and becoming deeply involved with new issue areas that concern you.

Before committing to this term of service, you may have already done some focused thinking about the type of work you want to do in the long term, and the impact you want to have in the world. But if you're like most people, you may still have questions to answer before you can connect your present self to that promising future.

One of the most frustrating and most exhilarating questions of a person's life may be: what should I *do* with it? This is what discernment is all about.

Discernment is the process of figuring out where your passions and values are leading you in your career and life. It may take any of these forms (later you'll find further discussion of each of these tools):

- First-hand experience
- Evaluation
- Observation
- Conversation



- Research
- Reflection, meditation, and/or prayer
- Self assessment

If done correctly, at the end of the process you should feel confident making decisions that influence your career and education. You should also be able to articulate the direction you are headed in, and why.

## Why does discernment matter to a service corps participant?

Participating in your corps enhances your discernment process by exposing you to all-new experiences, giving you time and a forum to reflect on these experiences, and putting you in touch with new networks of people whom you can learn from, observe, and talk with about their lives and choices.

Discernment during your term of service can help your career because the process will narrow down your many choices, allow you to prioritize your opportunities, and make your search for work or school more efficient. Once you have a sense of the direction you're moving in, you'll know better which networks to join, what questions to ask, which skills to build.

## Careering towards your future

You may have come into your service term with an unwavering sense of what you'll do when the term ends, and all you want now is some help getting there. On the opposite extreme, you may have no idea at all of what to do next, period, and hoped the term of service would offer you either a refuge from thinking about it for a while or a laboratory of self-reflection and discovery. You may also be somewhere in the middle.

It's probably best not to feel that you have to find one career choice that fits the rest of your life; that's old-school thinking. You may get pressure from others to find a single career path and stick to it but most people acknowledge that the traditional notion of 30-year career is long gone.

If you are participating in a service term at mid-career, you already know that career changes are almost inevitable in the United States today! People change jobs more frequently now than ever before, and the concept of "career" itself is ever-changing.

Steven Joiner, author of *The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for Sector Switchers*, likes to point out that an old variant of the word *to careen* is *to career*, as in:

### A PERSONAL STORY

My experience was that often (myself included), folks left their service experience feeling *less* focused on what they wanted to do. Many returned to whatever they were experiencing before their service, but many were confused at all the new roads their lives could take. For example, in college, I studied Peace, War, and Defense, and was sure that I wanted to work for the State Department or the Department of Defense. In hindsight, I was significantly less interested in the peace aspect than the war and defense aspect. I knew a lot about the history of warfare and about the modern threats to international security.

A year working with extremely poor people in the middle of nowhere, far from the constant media bombardment of security concerns in the post-9/11 world, left me confused about what path I should take. On the one hand, I'd been very good at the whole war and defense thing. On the other, I had come to focus on new priorities, realizing that I felt more meaning when I looked at what I could do on a micro level rather than what a defense analyst could theorize about on a macro level, removed from human touch and concern. With this new energy and motivation, though, I had no idea what to do with myself!

— Stacie, a former member of a faith-based service corps



**Career**, (verb): move swiftly and in an uncontrolled way in a specified direction  
(*The car careered across the road and through the hedge.*)

**Career**, (Archaic phrase): “in full career” meaning “at full speed.”

He adds that his own career can be described similarly—moving swiftly and in an uncontrolled way in a specified direction.

Indeed, how swiftly you move on to a new *job*—within the same *career* path you’ve been on, or a new one—may be pretty closely tied to your generation. Increasingly, people are staying in a job for a shorter amount of time than their parents and grandparents. While you may be more prone to move from job to job throughout your career than your grandparents were, that doesn’t necessarily mean you will constantly be launching yourself in new directions.

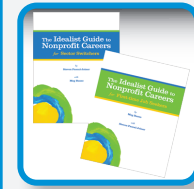
Beyond the discussion of changing *jobs* and *careers*, new fields of employment are emerging all the time—the career path you were born to lead may not even exist right now, even if you are mid-career or beyond.

Recognize that once you have invested in specialized education, started making a salary, and taken on expenses such as a mortgage and/or family, backing out of one path and embarking on another can be quite a challenge. For people at mid-career who’ve chosen to commit to a term of service as a way to switch to public service work from another career, you’re living that challenge. For corps members just starting out, the more you can do now to think through your options and personal compatibility with career choices, the better.

## Tools for discernment

What else can you do during your term to help you discern what’s next for you?

**First-hand experience** includes what you have done in the past and what you are doing during this service term. The more varied experiences you make for yourself, the more information you have to go on. Challenge yourself to try things you never thought you would enjoy, and volunteer in new roles or on new issue areas. If you receive email alerts about volunteer opportunities from Idealist, for example, set wide parameters, so that you find out about a range of organizations, volunteer roles, and social concerns. Be proactive about taking on varied roles during your term. Many programs offer opportunities to participate in corps recruitment, development, or research and evaluation, or to learn more about the history of the community you’re working in (especially if it’s new to you).



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

For an interesting discussion of nonlinear careers, see the **Introduction to *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*** (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/introduction.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/introduction.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/introduction.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/introduction.html)

### FAMOUS 20TH CENTURY CAREER CHANGERS

**Shirley Chisholm** was a teacher and educational consultant before entering elected office at the state, then federal, levels. In her mid-forties, she became the first black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

**Dorothy Day** was a journalist until her thirties when she helped found the first Catholic Worker House, a hospitality house that offers food, clothing, and shelter to people in need.

**Mohandas K. Gandhi** was a practicing lawyer in his mid-twenties when he began to dedicate his life and efforts to social activism. He went on to play a leading role in India’s independence from British colonial rule.

**Sargent Shriver**, first Peace Corps director, switched career directions many times and brought lessons learned from each stage of his career into the next. A law school graduate and World War II veteran, Shriver became a journalist, then managed an office building, led several government agencies, was appointed ambassador to France, and even ran for vice-president.



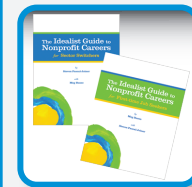
**Evaluation** is key to discernment. What kinds of activities, people, and environments give you more energy? Which activities, people, or environments leave you feeling depleted and empty? Also consider all the aspects of an experience. You may like the perks of a given job—for example, teachers may have summers off. But do you like working with kids, in a school, meeting testing standards, and not being able to vacation at the time of your choosing? Traveling with a job may sound fun, but if you are on the road a lot during your term of service, consider whether it's a compatible lifestyle for you. Do you like sustained contact with friends, family, pets? Do you recharge by spending time at home? Is tending your garden important to you?

**Observation** gives you a chance to see for yourself what different opportunities involve, and to see if they're for you—without participating first-hand. Occasionally, throughout your service term, take a morning or a day to shadow other people on the job to get a stronger idea of what their work actually entails. You may never have had a chance to work on an organic farm, but if you could spend a day or two seeing farmers in action, maybe even working alongside them and asking questions about their work, you'd get a more vivid understanding of farm work. Public interest law may sound good to you, but it's not something you can practice without a huge commitment of time, finances, and studies. But shadowing a lawyer or observing in a firm are ways to give yourself a clearer sense of what you'd be doing as a lawyer.

**Conversation** with professionals in your target field gives you a chance to introduce yourself to potential colleagues and employers, listen to advice, and ask questions of people who are already engaged in the types of careers you are considering. Informational interviewing is one format for these conversations (see sidebar). Informally, you can chat with people about their work and education at parties, community events, family reunions, online, and other settings.

**Research** is the way to find out what jobs, organizations, and/or degrees exist, what benefits you can expect from different career paths, where your skill set is most valued on the job market, and much more. The Career Tracks Exercise (see below) is one form of research.

**Reflection, meditation, and/or prayer** can play important roles for some people when making major life decisions. Consider using vacation time away from your service site to take part in a retreat or solo exploration if that would help you gather your thoughts. Or consult with leaders of your faith community about resources and traditions you can tap into that will help you. Faith-based service corps often organize gatherings that focus on how corps members can live out their faith beyond the service term.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Observation is an important

part of evaluating organizational culture, a topic discussed at length in **Chapter Seven** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch7.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch7.html)

### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch7.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch7.html)

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS 101

Informational interviews are a way to learn about your career options by interviewing the people who are already following a path that looks compelling to you. An informational interview is usually a very brief (about a half hour) exploratory chat with a person who has insights into a position, educational field, career path, organization, field of expertise, or issue area. It is not a job interview, nor is it ever an appropriate time to ask for a job. In an informational interview, your objective is to gather as much information and advice as possible, and to make contacts in the occupational areas and/or organizations that most interest you. You can do them in person, over email, online through video chat like Skype, or on the phone.

Read more about initiating and conducting an informational interview in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.





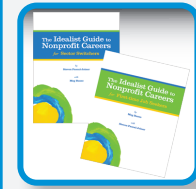
**Self assessment.** Finally, Chapter Three of *The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers* provides a number of self-assessment strategies and exercises that can help you frame your thinking about your future work.

**The Four Lens Framework** approach, developed by David Schachter of NYU's Wagner School of Public Service, aims to help you think more clearly about your career prospects by narrowing down what exactly you mean when you say “I want to work in education,” or “I want to work for the environment.” The four lenses refer to the primary frame you look through when viewing your career path: *organization*, *role*, *system*, and *issue*. If you come to this work through the *issue* lens, for example, you're likely to be committed to a cause you care about—anything from women's health to urban education to organic farming. You can start there and explore: what *organizations* are effecting change on this issue? What *role* can I best play in furthering this cause? What *system* do I see myself working within—a small, informal grassroots organization in start-up mode? A large, national nonprofit with a strict hierarchy and a significant budget? A university? A hospital? Read more about The Four Lenses Framework in Chapter Three of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

**The Career Tracks Exercise**, also developed by Schachter, gives you a way to explore job openings that inspire you—either because of the position description or the organization. The idea behind the exercise is to collect around 50 job descriptions that appeal to you because of either the kind of organization that's hiring, or the type of job itself. Do not limit yourself to any of the following criteria: job location, salary, or whether you are qualified to do the work. This exercise is more about what resonates with you than what you can actually do now, so cast a wide net! After collecting the job descriptions, analyze them to find commonalities—career tracks—and construct one to five such tracks that help you decide and prioritize your next steps. Career tracks can include issues, roles, organizations, or systems—and connect directly with one (or all) of the four lenses (see above). The exercise also emphasizes skills and networks you may need to enhance. You can find the full description of the exercise in Chapter Three of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

**The personal mission statement** activity by Cathy Wasserman also may help you. She encourages you to write your own mission statement to clarify your big-picture vision of your life's work, so that you avoid “mission drift”—taking on jobs and responsibilities not consistent with your true values.

During your service term, take advantage of these self-assessment exercises as you discern your career calling.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

To access  
the three self-

assessment exercises described here, as well as useful tips on researching salary ranges, see **Chapter Three** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html)

### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html)

## LISTEN TO A PODCAST

Check out the Idealist.org Careers podcast interview with David Schachter of NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service:

[http://idealists.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_id=323295](http://idealists.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=323295)





### ACE'S STORY: DISCERNMENT

Ace is spending his term weatherizing old buildings and learning what makes new construction projects eligible for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification.

As he carries out his service, he finds himself happier than he's ever been before—he loves the physical nature of the work. He really feels like a junior expert in his field, and that he has the potential to become a leader.

He is also meeting professionals from all around New Orleans who have seen his leadership potential in action. They regard him differently than anyone has ever looked at him before. It changes his own feelings about what he's capable of. He works side by side with these experts, observing them and capitalizing on their years of practice.

Ace has cultivated a mentor—an established contractor who has been willing to share the ups and downs of a career in green building. Through conversations with his mentor, and his own family, Ace is moving towards a career in **roles** that affect greening **issues**—weatherizing buildings or installing green technology. Because the field of green building is still young, and on the cusp of exploding, Ace is confident that he has a satisfying future career. He is optimistic about working within a **system** that straddles profit and the public good.

Ace's process of discernment has included **first-hand experience**, **evaluation**, **observation**, and **conversation**. He also realizes he's entering work through three of the four lenses: **role**, **issue**, and **system**.



### CESAR'S STORY: DISCERNMENT

Cesar teaches English in a community center for immigrants in Massachusetts through a faith-based service corps. Before he joined the corps, he appreciated the creativity he could employ in his old job selling mobile phones, and the amount of money he was able to earn. But he has found that the intangible rewards of helping recent immigrants find their way in the United States satisfies a higher calling.

Looking to his future, Cesar faces an obstacle. He's reluctant to consider his service term as a stepping stone to a career. In heeding the call to serve, he's primarily wanted to explore a deeper connection to his faith—not to add new skill sets to his resume. He feels uncomfortable capitalizing on his experiences this year to move himself up a career ladder.



## CESAR'S STORY (CONTINUED)

At a mid-year retreat for his corps, Cesar's spiritual advisor points out that although the motivation for service may be altruistic, the skills a person builds are authentic, and can open the door to a lifelong career in service to humanity.

Through prayer and reflection, Cesar comes to share this outlook. He eventually becomes certain that his next steps will involve working to improve life conditions for all people, and possibly earning a graduate degree in a related field.

He starts the Career Tracks Exercise, collecting job postings that appeal to him based on **type of organization** or **role within the organization**. When he's collected dozens of job postings, he realizes that the **system** that most appeals to him is a small, grassroots organization, because it would allow him to be creative and entrepreneurial—qualities he liked in his old job.

What he likes about his teaching role this year is that he has a direct connection with his students, and that his days have a lot of variety. But he doesn't see himself as a teacher for the long term, because he dislikes having a narrow focus on the classroom, and would rather have an impact on the organization as a whole. Working in a smaller organization would allow him to build its capacity, and would guarantee his contact with constituents, as well as his ability to wear many hats.

Cesar's process of discernment involved **first-hand experience**, **evaluation**, **prayer**, **talking with a spiritual mentor**, and **research**. By using the Career Tracks Exercise, he discovered the **kind of organization (system)** he would prefer to work within, as well as the **kind of job description (role)** and impact he'd like to have.



Discernment strengthens your confidence in responding to those nagging 'What will you do next year?' questions."

Discernment during your term of service strengthens your service experience by sharpening your senses and encouraging you to take on new opportunities and responsibilities. The process can bring direction to your work, and strengthen confidence in your response to those nagging "What will you do next year?" questions. Giving your career path direction also helps you to prioritize which additional skills you need to develop, as well as which additional relationships are important to nurture.



## Section two: Building skills

This section explores moving closer to your career goals by building skills that you can use during your term and beyond. After you identify the skills you need, you can practice general job-readiness and new technical skills during the regular course of your service. You can also seek out training by joining workshops in your community or online, taking on a volunteer position, or enrolling in a class. Finally, there's a discussion of constructive steps you can take if you find yourself in a lousy workshop.

Your term of service is an ideal time to build new skills because:

- You need skills to perform well
- Your service corps program likely offers skills training for you
- You have time to practice the new skills you learn
- You can discover new aptitudes

Because you aren't a permanent staff member at your site, you may even find your colleagues are more willing to give you room to make mistakes as you build new skills—an essential element to your learning process.

Building skills can also be part of discernment—offering you new, first-hand experiences that you may love or hate, that you may feel adept in or miserable at. Ask yourself, do some skills come more naturally than others? Do you enjoy exercising some of your new skill sets?

Give yourself time to improve—and pay attention to how much you enjoy practicing the different skills.

Skill building can also help you move closer to achieving professional goals you've identified through the process of discernment. If you decide you'd like to become a social worker, for example, you can find ways throughout your term to build skills useful for a career in social work, like community organizing and counseling.

### Identifying the skills you need

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Consider which skills you want to build: skills you need to carry out your service (you should get ample training during your term), and skills you may need for your future career. The two skill sets may or may not directly overlap. If they are very different, you have more of a challenge in getting the skills you need—but service is all about being resourceful!

To find out which new skills would be helpful to you *now*, think about the tasks



ahead of you that seem the most daunting. Look through your position description and work plan to see what lies ahead.

- Are you overwhelmed that you have to spread the word about an event coming up? Learning some approaches to marketing could help you.
- Have you always dreaded having to speak in public? You may benefit from a speech workshop.
- Does the thought of fundraising make you queasy? Cultivating a mentor who has development experience may make all the difference in your level of confidence.

## Practicing basic work skills

In addition to the technical skills you need to do your job well, other areas in which to seek support and training may address your ability to be happy and productive in a work environment, as well as your ability to successfully look and apply for jobs at the end of your term.

Especially if you are new to the workforce, use your service term to practice basic work skills that will be helpful to you for the rest of your professional life.<sup>1</sup>

## Locus of control and responsibility

Developed in the 1950s and 1960s by psychologist Julian Rotter, the term *locus of control* refers to your sense of what causes good and bad outcomes in your life.<sup>2</sup>

If you have a high *internal* locus of control, you feel confident that the actions you take contribute to your successes and failures. People who believe they have control over their own lives tend to be in better command of their own behavior, and to be more civically and politically engaged. They are motivated to make an effort because they feel their effort will succeed. People with high internal locus of control can also be plagued by anxiety when confronted by everyday situations that are truly out of their hands, such as getting stuck in traffic.

If you have a high *external* locus of control, you feel that your fate is in the hands or circumstance of others. People who believe they have little or no control over their lives tend to cope better with terminal illness because they don't blame themselves for getting sick in the first place. But a high external locus of control can also lead to

### LOCUS OF CONTROL

The Serenity Prayer, most commonly attributed to theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous, illustrates a balanced locus of control:

God grant me the serenity

To accept the things I cannot  
change;

Courage to change the things  
I can;

And wisdom to know the  
difference.

<sup>1</sup> Some of the following skill sets are part of the career transitions curriculum of the Heart of Oregon AmeriCorps ([www.heartoforegon.org](http://www.heartoforegon.org)), a Civic Justice Corps program in which the AmeriCorps members are previously court-involved youth who earn their GED and prepare to enter the workforce during their service term.

<sup>2</sup> Rotter, J.B. *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1954



frustration and anti-social behavior. You feel that no matter what you do, your needs won't be met, so you may resort to desperate measures.

During your term of service you can start to build a realistic sense of how your own actions contribute to your successes and failures. Taking fair responsibility for the positive and negative outcomes of your efforts can build your confidence, decrease your anxiety, and allow you to identify and grow from your own deeds—whether they were carried out well or poorly.

## **Accepting criticism**

As a person develops a stronger belief that their actions do influence their outcomes, accepting constructive criticism will become easier. Rather than feeling your supervisor unfairly picked on you and blamed you for a situation you had no control over, you can start to evaluate for yourself what you can do to improve your outcomes.

Hearing that someone disagrees with you or your actions usually stings at least a bit—more so if the person offering you feedback adopts a harsh tone. During your term, practice listening calmly to critiques of your performance. Rather than defending yourself right away, take time to think about what you've heard (take notes if that will help you). Where is the truth in what you've heard? What might be a misunderstanding that you can clear up? Where can you improve? What help do you need in order to improve?

When you are ready, go back to the person who provided the criticism, and be ready to apologize, accept responsibility, ask clarifying questions, and/or explain your side of things if it's necessary.

## **Keeping the job**

During your service term, you will have a chance to adopt professional habits and skills that can help you hold on to your position—allowing you to participate in the corps till the scheduled end of the term, and also preparing you for a job once your term ends.

Habits that will help you in the long term include:

- arriving to work on time
- communicating with your supervisor when you'll be late or absent
- respecting that your supervisor has authority
- asking for help when you need it
- prioritizing your tasks
- sticking to deadlines

Skills that will help you keep your job include understanding how to resolve conflicts with your supervisor and peers, and how to communicate your needs clearly.





## Resolving conflicts

Understanding what causes conflict and how to work through it (rather than avoid it) can be a particularly useful topic to explore during your term—one that can lead to a more successful work life later on. Practicing conflict resolution for your own conflicts, or to help mediate others, is also a useful skill.

Personal conflict occurs when something or someone is interfering with having your needs met, or vice versa. Needs can range from eating lunch to feeling confident in a leadership role. A famous theory about needs is Maslow's hierarchy.<sup>3</sup> Usually represented as a pyramid, his model illustrates that people need many things, not just food and shelter. As you meet your most basic needs, you can start fulfilling higher-order needs such as that for love and belonging, esteem, and living out your potential in life.

When your needs aren't being met, some understandable reactions are:

- ignoring the conflict, but silently seething about the person or situation you think is responsible for causing it, which can cause the conflict to grow.
- suggesting a way to solve the problem and then arguing with others who have come up with their own solution. The various solutions are called *positions*.

The trick is to address the conflict, directly with people you think can help you, and listen to each other's *needs*—rather than emphasize each of your *positions*. By having a conversation about your needs, you can brainstorm a longer list of possible solutions that satisfy everyone's needs.



### ACE'S STORY: RESOLVING CONFLICTS

Ace arrives at his service site daily at 8:15. His team leader Zoe has made it clear that the start time for everyone is 8:00. Otherwise, Ace is a stellar corps member and everyone looks up to him. Ace's *position* is that he can't arrive earlier, period, and he feels he's being singled out for something trivial. He works hard and doesn't deserve to be treated like a sixth-grader. Zoe's *position* is that Ace shouldn't get special treatment. The rule is to arrive at 8:00a.m.

They could go back and forth all day arguing about what time Ace arrives. Instead, Ace explains that because he has to drop his daughter off at school at 7:45, he simply can't make it to the service site till 8:15. He has no control over the bus schedule. He needs to be able to drop his daughter off at a time she'll be supervised and safe, and he has no control over what time the school's breakfast starts. No one else in his family can take her, and she's too young to take the bus herself. His hands are tied.

<sup>3</sup> Maslow, A.H. "A Theory of Human Motivation" *Psychological Review* Vol 50, No 4, 1943



### ACE'S STORY (CONTINUED)

Zoe explains that if Ace, one of the strongest on the team, shows up late daily without consequence, the rest of the team wonders why they can't also arrive late—and in fact more corps members have been tardy lately, probably as a result of her leniency with Ace. Zoe also points out that this corps experience is something of a job-training program. Ace would have to arrive on time to any other job, or he'd lose it. It's unrealistic to think he can hold down a job where he's always late. His tardiness also means the team has to wait for him every morning to go over the day's assignment, and that delay means they are late loading into the van that takes them to the day's green building site. And *that* delay means they have less time to carry out their service. Ace's daily tardiness impacts the whole team, and reflects badly on Zoe as the leader.

Once Ace and Zoe hear each other out, they understand the problems better. They can think of a range of solutions such as:

- Zoe could help Ace find a ride from the school to the site every morning instead of his depending on the bus.
- Zoe could shift the day's schedule back by 15 minutes for all corps members since others have struggled to arrive on time—so the day would officially start and end 15 minutes later.

In the end, Ace finds a ride with a corps member who lives near his daughter's school. Resolving the conflict wasn't too difficult—but if they hadn't listened to what each other really needed, the tension would have mounted and morale among the team members would have begun to erode. The team would have lost productivity as well as respect for Ace and for Zoe.

## Keeping track of the skills you need to acquire

To come up with a list of skills you'd like to develop for your future career ambitions, do The Career Tracks Exercise described on page 15 of this *Companion* and examine the job descriptions you've collected. What qualifications and skills are required of the jobs you might like to hold in the future? As you draw up your list of required skills, you'll likely see strengths you don't yet possess. If that list of new skills is long, you may feel overwhelmed—but don't lose hope. Figure out which competencies you have a chance to gain this year, and go for it.

If you work best with charts and graphs, you may want to create a skills calendar for yourself that takes into consideration both short- and long-term career goals. Using your work plan or job description, you can figure out which skills you'll develop during your service term. You may have some of these skills already, or you may need

### LEARNING LOGISTICS THE HARD WAY

During my first City Year, I had the opportunity to co-organize a service project for about 50 people. The project was cleaning a church basement which had been neglected for years, and was needed as a community space and day-care center. My co-organizer and I worked for many hours planning every detail of the project, based on what we'd witnessed during our corps year so far. We planned a team-building activity to start the day; we divided the work into discrete tasks and estimated the amount of time and people needed to complete each of them; we solicited in-kind donations for lunch; we made sure we had lots of water; we even identified the nearest hospital in case of an emergency. We thought we were ready!

The day of the service project arrived, and everything was off to a good start. People were in good spirits, and the pastor of the church was thrilled with the progress we were making. At the end of the day, though, we had filled about 45 trash bags, which were overflowing into the church's neighbors' backyards! We hadn't arranged for a dumpster or a trash pick-up, so we were in trouble. My co-organizer and I felt terrible that we hadn't foreseen this abundance of trash. It was a logistical lesson I haven't forgotten. Now, garbage and recycling collection is one of the first things I think of when planning a project!

—Hannah Kane, former City Year corps member and Senior Project Manager, Website and Multimedia Production, Idealist.org



more training. If you have a sense of what professional development skills you need in order to accomplish your future career goals, you can use a skills calendar to figure out if there are any additional roles you can volunteer for to garner these experiences.

### Skills calendar

Timeframe	Task	Skill sets I'll use	Do I have this skill?	Training I need	Additional skills I could seek via this project
This week	Compose newsletter article	Writing	Some-what	Find out how to write a compelling opening paragraph	Help proofread newsletter, learn layout software
Next month	Parents Night	Event planning, marketing	Event planning	Need marketing know-how	Asking local businesses for in-kind donations of refreshments

## Ways to learn new skills

The next several pages offer some suggestions for inexpensive ways to get the training you need.

### On-the-job training

Look for new opportunities within your service assignment to build skills. Consider projects that enable you to better serve your constituents, and that let you add your target skills to your resume.

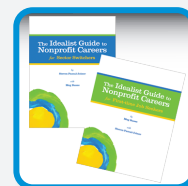
Here are some examples of ways you can find opportunities to practice new skill sets during your term:

- become a better facilitator by leading a meeting
- gain development skills by organizing a fundraising campaign (if your program permits you to fundraise)
- hone your networking skills by representing your organization at a community event
- develop volunteer management skills by becoming a volunteer leader at a community service project
- develop your writing and editing skills by starting a blog; invite other corps members, colleagues, or organizational constituents to contribute.

The key to on-the-job training is finding mentors who will guide you, help you process successes and failures, and teach you about effective practices so that you can do your best work.

### ABOUT MENTORS

Seek out a mentor to help you get started developing new areas of expertise you need for your service assignment. Your mentor can be a counterpart at your own, or another, organization. Find mentors through local and national professional associations for your field, or by asking the people responsible for training you. For example, if you're recruiting and managing volunteers, seek a mentor who is the volunteer resource manager at another nonprofit in your area and/or who is available to help you over email (if you are serving remotely).



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

You can read more about

cultivating mentors as well as gaining skills through volunteering and interning in **Chapter Five** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

#### First-time Job Seekers version

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## Attending workshops and trainings

Many service corps and host sites are supportive of professional development and getting you the training you need to do your best work. Your service corps may offer mandatory or optional trainings. You may also locate training opportunities in your community and online.

Professional development has manifold benefits. Participation in professional development workshops demonstrates your interest in and commitment to building necessary skills. Having relevant training in your dossier will inform prospective employers about your commitment to learning the skills you need to succeed.

Skill building allows you to excel in implementing your project, and can help you learn some skills faster than you would simply through on-the-job training. Later in your career you may not have as frequent and cost-free access to professional development as you do now, so it literally pays to take advantage of training when it comes along.

Attending workshops takes little time compared to enrolling in a course, certification program, or graduate degree program, because workshops typically meet once for a few hours, and any homework you walk away with is yours to create and complete. Even service corps that prohibit corps members from going to school part-time often support member efforts to seek out community-based workshops.

The following discussion takes a look at places to find training—online, in your community, and through your service corps. The information here may also prove useful for people who have already made the transition to a new job following a term of service.

### Who offers professional development workshops?

When looking for training during your term of service, you should start in two places: your service corps program staff and/or your host site supervisor.

Chances are good that if you have a service corps program director or team leader who organizes your group's trainings, they want to know what skills you need. Speak up! Even if they don't ask, be proactive about requesting specific skills training, and brainstorm with them about free and alternative ways to find the professional development you need.

Some service corps participants have the luxury of accessing training in their local host community. You should also feel free asking your host site supervisor for help—they may have put some training funds in the budget when they applied to host you. Even if there's no additional money to help you access training, your

### COMMUNICATE YOUR TRAINING NEEDS

Different people have different attitudes about professional development during their service term. Some people love the opportunity to come together with other corps members or professionals to learn new skills in a workshop setting, or to learn online at their own pace. Others dislike the disruption from their service, or find gatherings a waste of time. Especially if you find yourself resisting mandatory in-service training, note that the abundant training opportunities will likely slow down once you've transitioned to a job. Many recent service corps alumni find that, for better or for worse, it's hard to access as many professional development options once their term is over.

If you're unhappy about your program's workshop offerings, or if you need training that you aren't getting, please speak up! Talk to the people responsible for training you: a program officer, team leader, site supervisor, or host country counterpart. Asking for help can be challenging. So can pinpointing what training you need, especially when you are new to a skill or field. As you build relationships with people during your term, share the challenges you face and learn from them which methods, skill sets, and solutions you might try.



supervisor is more likely to be well connected to your community and to know where you can look for free training.

For corps members serving remotely (internationally or domestically), you may not find formal training in your town. Look to people you know in your community who have the skills your project requires. Reach out to request assistance and mentoring from them. You may know a fellow corps member in another region who can come work on your project for a while, in exchange for your offering help on their project another time.

Outside of your service networks, you may find professional development workshops offered by technical assistance providers, foundations, and community groups (keep reading for a full discussion). Look for online trainings if you are serving in a remote location and/or overseas.

**Management support or technical assistance organizations** focus on supporting nonprofit professionals through workshops on a range of topics—from administering budgets and using new technology to being a more effective manager of staff and volunteers. To find a support organization near you, see the sidebar at right.

Similarly, **local foundations** often organize professional development workshops. To find out about these workshops, you could start by finding local foundations in your area and searching their websites, and talking with people already established in the field.

The local chapter of **your field's professional association** might offer conferences or regular meetings with guest speakers on relevant topics. Regional and national associations typically have annual meetings with workshops as well. Be sure to ask whether event fees can be discounted or waived; also find out if student chapters exist in your area (where costs may be more affordable). Your professional association may offer certification that helps you stand out in your field.

When looking for professional associations, don't limit yourself to those that operate solely within your sector or use the language you are used to. Note that many job functions are equivalent in nonprofit, business, and government sectors—often just the names change. For example, what's commonly known as “marketing” at a company is thought of as “outreach” for many nonprofits, and “public affairs” for government agencies. Terms will differ across languages and cultures as well.

Another place to find professional development gatherings is with **community**

## FINDING WORKSHOPS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Besides the specific organizations listed in the main discussion here, many others all over the world post their events, including workshops, on **Idealist.org**. If you don't already get email alerts from Idealist about events coming up in your city, go to your control panel and edit your email alert options. If you are not a member of Idealist yet, go to our homepage to join (it's free!).

Idealist's **Nonprofit FAQ** ([www.idealists.org/if/i/en/faq/166-227/85-56](http://www.idealists.org/if/i/en/faq/166-227/85-56))

lists nonprofit support organizations throughout the United States and around the world.

Most areas have some kind of listserv these days to keep the nonprofit community in touch. The Young Nonprofit Professionals Network is an association with 25 local chapters across the United States that often host an active listserv. Many states and provinces have an association of nonprofits with websites and/or e-newsletters that can keep you updated about relevant opportunities. Similarly, weekly or daily newspapers often feature community calendars. If you don't know where workshops are advertised in your community, ask for leads at your local nonprofit association, in your program director's office, at your service site, or during a volunteer activity. Someone will know.

Don't forget to ask your fellow service corps participants and leaders in your community who they know and what skills they have—you may have a lot to learn from each other.



**groups** that meet regularly, like foreign language conversation groups in your community, groups of former Peace Corps Volunteers or AmeriCorps members, and Toastmasters (an association that helps people develop public speaking and leadership skills). Often a public library will offer lunchtime speaker series and other community events, which you can inquire about at an information desk. Finally, natural food markets and other community-minded businesses that have space may offer workshops on a variety of topics including professional development.

## What to look for in workshops

The workshops designed by your service program should have your needs in mind, including restrictions you may face in implementing your project. Ideally, they should also be targeted to your level of experience and be realistic about your timeframe. If they are not, let your program director know what you need.

Here are some things to look and ask for in a workshop:

- **Community-specific, practical information.** For example, if the workshop is about marketing, get ideas for marketing your programs in the local media, leads on local graphic designers with whom you could work to design materials, and so on.
- **A hands-on practice component,** which allows you to try out a new skill under the guidance of your instructor before having to perfect the skill on the job. For example, a workshop on conflict resolution might involve role-playing a mediation in which you could practice getting two conflicting parties to come to some kind of solution.
- **Time for networking.** Because you are likely in the room with corps members or local professionals who are looking for the same type of information or skills as you, you'll meet people you can learn from and who can learn from you. Meeting only once for a few hours does not give you the extended time, however, to build relationships with workshop classmates. You'll have to be intentional about following up with new contacts. Try to get the email addresses of two to three new people that you meet at training events. Every gathering is an opportunity to network.
- **Highly relevant, practical information, including "takeaways"**—new tools, resources, or ways of doing things that you can implement as soon as you get back to your service site. The workshop format typically does not lend itself to the exploration of theory, but if that is important to you, ask the facilitator to recommend books you can find later at the library.

## Online or distance training

Advancing technology expands training options. You can learn a lot by reading online, and you can also take part in actual training sessions offered from a distance.





Professional associations, foundations, and other groups that offer professional development opportunities may hold workshops the old-fashioned way—in a room where you meet people face-to-face, converse, and even enjoy refreshments! Other times these groups may hold the workshops via a web connection and conference call as a “webinar.” Webinars are often easier to access (you don’t have to leave your home or office), and typically feature a speaker who narrates a Powerpoint presentation and may invite participation from workshop attendees over the phone or by instant messaging. You may learn to prefer one type of workshop over the others. Because of the costs of hosting “webinars,” a fee may be attached to participate. But many nonprofit providers offer their workshops for free or at a low-cost. Here are two examples:

- **The Resource Center** ([www.nationalserviceresources.org](http://www.nationalserviceresources.org)), a federally-owned website and repository of national service resources and effective practices, offers free online training and recorded webinars on a range of topics. Anyone can access the resources for free. Designed especially for domestic service corps program staff and participants, international volunteers may also find several of their web-based sessions to be useful. The technical assistance providers and trainers who submit tools and effective practices to The Resource Center work hard to make sure the offerings posted there are accessible to people of all abilities.
- **Techsoup** ([www.techsoup.org/hsc/webinars/](http://www.techsoup.org/hsc/webinars/)) offers nonprofit professionals free webinars on a range of topics related to using technology and social media to meet organizational fundraising, marketing, volunteer recruitment, and general operational needs.

#### LISTEN TO A PODCAST

Check out The New Service podcast from Idealist.org about The Resource Center:

<http://thenewservice.wordpress.com/2009/04/17/theresourcecenterpodcast/>

## Alternative avenues for training

Besides formal professional development training, other avenues for building skills include:

- **Volunteering (to bolster and gain new experience).** Outside of your service hours, sharing your time and talents with a nonprofit or school expands your networks, lets you explore new skill areas, and gives you a chance to work on issues unrelated to your service project (if you want). Some service corps allow you to count occasional volunteer hours toward your service commitment.
- **Going to school part-time, or taking one class at a time.** Most people think of going back to school as an all-or-nothing proposition. But going to school part-time (or full-time) while you continue to work, or serve in a corps, has advantages for your school, your employer or service corps, and you—such as giving you a theoretical framework for understanding your service experience; increasing the level of skill you offer your host organization; and sharing your networks and real-world insights with others in the classroom. Some corps,



such as AmeriCorps VISTA, do not allow current corps members to enroll in school. Other programs, such as Mississippi Teacher Corps, are designed to allow participants to pursue graduate school during their term of service. Read more about graduate education on the Idealist.org Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center, [www.idealistschool.org](http://www.idealistschool.org).

## **On making the most of a lousy workshop**

Sometimes workshop facilitators, bless their hearts, fail. Experts they may be, but their ability to convey their knowledge can fall flat if they aren't aware of their audience's particular needs, or if they appear arrogant or uncomfortable in front of a crowd. In an attempt to be humorous—or to make a complex topic easier to understand—they may even offend you.

Likewise, it sometimes happens that corps members—mandated to attend workshops, taking time out of their busy schedule at the service site—show up to required trainings with a negative attitude. Or it may be that the topic covered in a mandated workshop is not something a corps member thinks they need to learn about.

Lest you walk into any of the above scenarios, here are some words of encouragement and caution.

Keep an open mind; unless you are participating in a corps after years of relevant experience, you may have a lot to learn—listen closely, follow up on references and resources mentioned during the workshop, and ask questions that help the facilitator make the workshops more relevant to you (but don't monopolize the time!). Even if the workshop is a “failure” or a “waste of time”, there should be plenty of follow-up—resources, contacts, etc.—to make your time worthwhile over the long run.

Workshop presenters usually try their best to transfer relevant information to you, and they are probably not responsible for the rule that forces you to be at the workshop. So cut them some slack. That said, you will inevitably run into a workshop that you'd prefer to run out of. In this case, it's time to take action. (Keep a copy of the list below in your wallet; you may want to refer to it when you are in a lousy workshop.)



## Tactics to survive a lousy workshop

If you find yourself in a workshop that really does need some improvement, be proactive:

- If you notice that the rest of the crowd has also lost interest, or is about to start throwing tomatoes, attempt to be a good sport by raising your hand when invited to offer ideas, or to ask questions. Challenge yourself to participate—it will keep you occupied.
- Learn from negative examples. If certain workshop conventions bug you—say, the use of icebreakers—make a point never to employ those conventions during workshops you lead. If your facilitator is making wild assumptions about who is in the room, note the importance of researching the audience prior to your next speaking engagement.
- Maintain your professionalism as much as you are able; resist the urge to write notes to your peers sitting near you. They may actually be getting something out of the workshop. (After the event ends, feel free to explore this very question with them.)
- Make a list of what you had hoped to get from the workshop so that you know what to look for elsewhere once you leave.
- When you've reached the end of your rope, take a deep breath and try drawing a perfect circle. Really, try it.
- Offer constructive feedback on evaluation forms; it really doesn't help to adopt a nasty tone on these.
- Approach workshop organizers about your concerns, after the event is over. Be kind.
- Volunteer to share your knowledge by facilitating your own workshop at the next event, or to organize an Open Space session (see sidebar).
- Remember to use the event for networking, including chatting with acquaintances and people you've never met, gathering contact information, and following up with them later on.

## OPEN SPACE

Open Space, or Open Space Technology, is a kind of conference structure where participants establish and run their own working sessions around themes important to them, such as “conflict resolution at the service site,” or “effective practices for running focus groups.” After the topics are proposed, participants choose the session they'd like to be part of—and can leave whenever they'd like to check out a different session. A participant facilitates each session, while another member of the group takes notes to share with the larger conference. While the idea of conference participants breaking off to talk about their own topics seems chaotic at first, it's actually an efficient way for many people to get what they need out of a conference session. Usually only one or two time slots are given to Open Space, while the rest of the day is structured more traditionally.

To learn more about the model, check out [OpenSpaceWorld.org](http://OpenSpaceWorld.org).

Many recent alumni of service corps are shocked when they start their first post-corps position, because regular occurrences of free, mandated, in-service professional development opportunities are no longer available. When you have graduated from your program and are busy in a new job, you may sorely miss the emphasis on training and skills development that you've grown accustomed to as a corps member. Take time now to bask in opportunities for new knowledge and networking with others in your program.





### BEA'S STORY: BUILDING SKILLS

Bea has started her term of service with a better-than-average grasp of sustainable agriculture and public health concepts—some of the central issue areas she is tackling during her term.

But she soon realizes that her role this year—connecting public school cafeterias with local farms—requires skill sets beyond her experiences. For example, getting cafeteria workers to consent to change their menus to provide healthier options requires creating and working with budgets. Negotiating an agreement between local organic farmers and the school board requires mediation and even some background in putting together basic contracts.

She emails Jim, her service corps' team leader (a corps member serving a second year, whose role is to support Bea and others on the team), to find out if negotiation, mediation, or budgeting will be covered in upcoming workshops. Jim writes back that budgeting will be covered in the context of personal financial management, but nothing more than that. He also says they will soon offer a conflict mediation workshop but that it wouldn't go into contracts at all. He recommends contacting a local nonprofit that provides "technical assistance" training, to see if anything like that is offered there. He also isn't sure she should be taking on the responsibility of contract negotiation herself.

In the end Bea does get the support she needs in budgeting, and in addition to the training, the workshop presenter offers resources Bea can check out on her own at the library. She also begins to understand the essential elements in mediating an agreement with two sides. However, her efforts to build skills around basic contracts stall. Her host site is reluctant to pay the costly fee for her to attend a class in contract development, and she doesn't make it very far reading a book on the topic on her own. However, her site supervisor agrees to recruit a pro bono attorney to help Bea with that piece of her service project.

As Bea connects with skills training, she learns that her passion for the **issue** of sustainable agriculture isn't in itself enough to build a career. She also needs to figure out what **role** she is suited to play. She finds that she really likes educating cafeteria workers and the kids about nutritious ways of eating. She also likes working with the local farmers to develop a subscription model for the school district to buy their produce throughout the year, and to increase their access to new consumers. She feels that consumers are the key to succeeding for small organic farms. But Bea dislikes what she's observed of the legal nitty-gritty of contract work. She resolves not to become a lawyer. She also dislikes working within the bureaucracy of the public school **system**, where so many layers exist for decision making.



**Building skills throughout the term is a great way to work on the career transition."**

Building skills throughout the term is a great way to work on your career transition. Building skills helps you be more effective in your service role, and prepares you for



taking on leadership roles when it's time to move on. It also helps you further narrow down your next steps because you can draw from an abundance of first-hand experience. You may be surprised at how naturally some skills come to you, or how much joy you derive from employing them. You can also learn which areas are a struggle for you—and either accept your limitations or work harder to overcome them if it's critical to your future. Your term of service is an opportune time to focus on skill building because you can put your skills and training to immediate use, boosting the impact of your service.

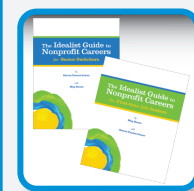
## Section three: Building relationships

This section explains why building relationships is important for the success of your service term and how those relationships can sustain your career development as well. Resources in this section include how to get started creating collaborative partnerships from scratch in case that's something you'll do during your term. Other topics here include making contact, etiquette, finding places to meet new people, and bolstering your existing networks. For corps members serving in remote areas overseas or in the United States, where connecting with professionals in your field may be a bit difficult, this section also includes a discussion about alternative ways to network.

During your term of service, you will likely have *many reasons* to engage people, support them, and receive support in return. Many service corps participants bring community leaders and groups together in order to offer high-quality service to clients, improve schools and towns, and share and conserve resources. Meeting former participants of your service corps gives you a chance to ask for advice or get insights into the ways things work. Getting to know local business owners opens the door to cross-sector partnerships and understanding what these community stakeholders envision for their neighborhood or town. Building partnerships with like-minded nonprofits and government agencies allows each to multiply its impact and reach.

To some, the word “networking” has a negative connotation as something potentially smarmy. The word often invokes mental images of people in slick suits looking to get ahead at the expense of others. In the wrong hands, networking can look like that, but that isn't always the case.

In the context of social impact work, networking is very much about engaging your community, pooling knowledge and resources, making connections with others to build a better world, and giving *at least* as much as you get. Just like you would jump at the chance to connect two friends who are each looking for a roommate, other people will eagerly assist you in your search for collaboration or career advice.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Building relationships

is a form of networking. Beyond the discussion here, **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Non-profit Careers* (free PDF) explores networking as a key part of your career search.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)

### LISTEN TO A PODCAST

Check out the Idealist.org Careers podcast interview about networking with *The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers* for First-time Job Seekers author Meg Busse:

<http://thenewservice.wordpress.com/2008/12/05/networkingpodcast>



Finally, being a resource to other people can be a cornerstone of your life's work from now on. Look to build relationships not just with people who are more established in their careers than you are, but also with people at all stages of their lives and careers—you'll provide each other with immeasurable support as you move forward on your goals.

The discussion in the text box on the following pages offers a blueprint for thinking about building a network from scratch and cultivating new partners. Community partnerships are valuable for a variety of reasons, including sharing resources, getting up to speed on what your community is already doing, and ensuring that your project isn't replicating services already offered by others. If you are new to the community, or new to this work, you may have to start building your network from the ground up. Once you have established a network of community partners for your current service objectives, you'll be able to turn to the same network for career guidance and support as your term comes to an end, and onward as you progress in your career.

For people who may feel more isolated in their service—international volunteers serving independently, or service participants in very small communities—this discussion also offers some ideas for networking in the face of challenges.

## Building a network of community partners

Possibly the single most important professional development step you can take during your term of service—beyond working hard and doing a good job—is building relationships with community partners, mentors, individuals at your host site, and other people you come into contact with through your work.

If you are in a corps that enables you to build partnerships with outside organizations, creating those relationships can be important for the success of your service project. Oftentimes organizational staff are too busy with the day-to-day duties of their organization to explore ways of working together with other groups. As a corps member, you can play a valuable role in pulling your organization out of its silo. Be careful to let your supervisor know what partnerships you're building and make sure they sign off on any agreement that involves another organization.

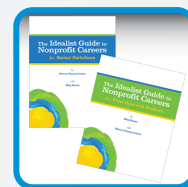
Working together with other groups in your community:

- Saves each group time and money by sharing responsibility and resources. Sharing costs with other organizations makes you a good steward of donations, and builds donors' faith in you. Sharing resources and know-how, your partnership has more to offer your constituent base than you can offer them on your own.
- Builds buy-in and brings credibility to your work. If you are working in a

## A NOTE ABOUT BUILDING NETWORKS OF PARTNERS

Note that some service corps do not offer members the chance to establish new, formal community partnerships. If this is the case for you, the section below may not apply as much, but it's still an important part of your term to get to know people in your community.

Further, in some circumstances, corps members may need to build career networks from a distance—for example, for people planning to move elsewhere when the term has ended. Starting on page 60 in [Part Two](#) of this *Companion*, read more about the long distance job search for international volunteers, corps members serving in remote locations, and people planning to transition to a job somewhere else.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

### Chapter Four of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) details networking for career purposes and explains informational interviews—a crucial tool. These interviews can also enhance your prospects of creating durable community partnerships during your term of service. The chapter also offers sage advice about networking etiquette (among the most important rules: don't ask for a job and always write thank you notes.)

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)





## Building a network of community partners (continued)

field where other organizations may perceive you as a threat, ask them to help you and guide you so that your work is successful and they can take part of the credit. Partnering with more established organizations and community leaders lets the public and funders know that you are legitimate and can be trusted.

- Expands everyone's networks and reach to co-brand your efforts so your constituents will learn about your partners, and their constituents will learn about you.
- Limits competition and increases specialization so that you can focus on a specific gap in services or resources rather than duplicating programs and events that already exist elsewhere in the community.

Community partnerships can take many shapes. This discussion will help you identify community partners through a series of questions to ask yourself. Included are some basic tools for managing the relationships, and a list of different partnership models to draw from as needed.

### Identifying community partners

As you shape your partnerships during the year, these are some guiding questions. Keep in mind that it will take time, research, conversations, and other methods to answer all of them.

#### 1. What's the project?

Be as specific as possible about the project you have in mind—though it may be just a concept, your project should have clear goals, and you should have a sense of key stakeholders, constituents, and others you seek to involve. Ask yourself:

- Whom does the project aim to serve?
- Who is already involved?
- How do I fit in? (Am I brand new to an existing project? Am I starting a new project from scratch?)
- How does the project fit in with this work in my region? (Are many nonprofits or agencies already working on some aspect of the problem?)

#### 2. Who is already working in this area?

Through informational interviews—starting with people you know such as current staff and former corps members at your host organization—see if you can get a clear picture of the playing field. You'll want to figure out:

- Who are the big and small fish in this pond (other individuals, organizations, funders, networking groups)?
- Who will see the project as a threat, if anyone? (How is the project unique enough that it's not really a threat?)
- Who will be excited about the project?
- How can I meet these people? (Do I know someone who knows someone...?)

#### 3. What are the project's needs and my needs?

Beyond what your organization can do on its own, take stock of what your project requires. You've probably given this some thought so try to be as specific and realistic as possible.

- Project's needs: resources (equipment, food, transportation, etc), legal obligations (permits, insurance), skills, talent, time, paid and/or unpaid staffing, structure, meeting and/or event venues, public relations and marketing.
- My needs: training, mentors, orientation to broader issue area, introductions to key stakeholders, encouragement, realistic expectations.

#### 4. Who can help meet my needs and those of the project? What do they need?

Through the networking you have done so far, you should have a pretty good sense of who can help you, who is willing to help you, and who can't be bothered.



## Building a network of community partners (continued)

- Including people you have already listed in response to the questions above, who would best champion the project and help move it forward? Who has the resources and would be willing to share?
- For partners to make the effort worth their time, or justifiable to their organizations, what do they each need in return? Similar goals? Expansion to a key network? Influence in the decision-making process? A mention in the project's promotional materials or webpages? A formal thank you? Inclusion on an advisory board? What can my organization realistically offer them?
- For people who may perceive this project as a threat, how can I reach out and include them?

### What shapes can partnerships take?

Below are some community partnership models that may be useful. Some are ways to invite organizations to work with you, while others offer opportunities for individuals to contribute to your project.

#### *Ways to work with organizations*

- Coordinating partnerships: Stopping short of working together, coordinating ensures that your timing and efforts work around what another organization is doing, rather than conflict or compete with it. For example if you share a similar donor base with another organization or project, you might stagger your fundraising campaigns so that you aren't both reaching out to the same people at the same time.
- Collaborating partnerships: Going further, collaborating means pooling resources and efforts. If you and another group both aim to organize a service day at a local elementary school, you could build a coalition and organize one larger, more successful service day.
- Event or project co-sponsors: In order to help you with marketing your event or project, you might enlist organizations who are in touch with the audience you'd like to reach. In exchange for shared branding, they may be willing to tell their constituents or partners about your work. For example, if you are organizing a health fair, a local hospital may advertise the event among its network of practitioners, patients, and visitors, in exchange for the hospital logo on signs for the event.
- Sponsors, donors, and other funders: Building relationships with potential funders can have a lasting impact on your work by helping to make it financially sustainable.

#### *Ways to engage community leaders and constituents*

- Advisory board(s): An advisory board is a team of people you handpick for their helpfulness to you, their experience, and their voice in the community. If you put together an advisory board for your work, take into consideration the range of experience you'd like to have on the board as you draft your invitation list. Consider also the specific participation agreement for board members, and what will happen to the board after your term ends. Be careful to invite both the established players who have a substantial stake in your field as well as people who represent other fields in which you need guidance (like mentoring youth and volunteer resource management).
- Constituent or youth council: To help ensure your organization's constituents have a say in programmatic activities and decisions, you can ask a few to serve on an advisory board, or create a board just for them that will give you feedback in terms of their needs and ideas for what could work better. If your project works primarily with youth, for example, you might create a board specifically for young people.
- Steering committee or working group: For short-term projects and events, you can build a loose coalition of partners who come together for a specific purpose and then disband once the project or event is over and evaluated.
- Speakers bureau: Community partners can serve as speakers representing the field or your collaboration, as needed.
- Contest judges or readers: Does your program need readers for proposals or award nominations, or judges for a contest? Consider asking community leaders to play these roles, both for their acumen and to offer them a stake in seeing your project succeed.



## Building a network of community partners (continued)

- Key volunteers: Invite partners to play a special or one-time role in your project. Does your event need keynote speakers or volunteer captains? Does your tutoring program need someone to train tutors on a specific math or literacy issue? Professionals often lend their skills for free, as pro-bono consultants.
- “The loop”: Sometimes you meet someone who gets what you are doing and who is a fan, but who doesn’t fit any category of partnership that you need right now. Or you may be a fan of someone you met, maybe a board member of your organization, a current or former corps member of your program, or a speaker at a dinner you attended. How can you stay in touch with these contacts? Keep them in the loop. If you have an e-newsletter, ask permission to add them to the mailing list. If you are having an event, invite them. Send them an email when you see something of interest to them. If appropriate, befriend them on a social networking site like Twitter or LinkedIn, or even Facebook or a book-sharing social network. If they have a blog, add it to your blogroll (a list of blogs you like).

### Making the ask

Once you have selected people you think it would be wise to work with, it’s time to make “the ask.” Depending on your vision for the partnership, you can invite them to work with you in writing (over email), over the phone, or in person. If you are asking them to serve on a board or to take on another more formal partnership role, you might present guidelines or even a partnership agreement in writing. If you have expectations of them, it’s important to be clear about them up front, both for the success of the partnership and because it’s also good etiquette.

If you want to work with a prominent community leader you don’t know very well personally, it may be a good idea to work through an intermediary, someone they know well, who can champion your cause before you make the ask.

### Maintaining the relationship

The key to any strong relationship is to *spend time together*—that’s why it’s easier to make friends in college or a service corps than almost any other time in your life. In terms of your community partnerships, face time is important, either formally through scheduled meetings or informally over coffee or meals.

*Be considerate and offer your partners as much help as you can, while working within the bounds of your organization’s policies. Remember that your partners also feel the scarcity of resources, money, and time. Also keep in mind the social obligations that come with partnership in your host community or culture. Rely on someone who is local and will be frank with you to help guide your steps as you build these relationships.*

## PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

A partnership agreement can be a formal or informal document that details what each partner will contribute to a relationship. Agreements are often helpful to show both what partners are contributing and what they’re getting in return (which may encourage upper level management to sign on). Agreements also allow partners to hold each other accountable. Written agreements are useful especially if the collaboration involves some kind of financial expenditure (for example, if the partner is renting a van for an event, and your organization is purchasing lunch). Your agreement should also include effective dates, and the name and contact information for a person at each organization who is overseeing the agreement.

Finally, if the agreement is a formal one, it can include a clause about what happens if either side fails to meet any tenet of the agreement, disclaimers, and the signatures of representatives from both organizations. Formal agreements can also be called memoranda of understanding (MOU) or contracts. Before entering into any agreement, you should make sure that the appropriate permanent staff at your organization backs the agreement and signs off on it.



**For your own  
benefit as well  
as for that of  
your work, stay  
organized.”**



## Building a network of community partners (continued)

For your own benefit as well as for that of your work, *stay organized*.

- Have copies of typed agendas ready for meetings you facilitate (email them out ahead of time if you can).
- Use an action plan to keep track of which partner will take the lead on which activities and what the deadlines are for tasks.
- Take notes at meetings and share them with the group.
- Follow up with volunteers and partners after events, sharing key facts and numbers so that everyone can partake in the sense of accomplishment.

### Action plans

Action plans are similar to a shared to-do list and are useful when you are working with a team of community partners. Organized as a table, the column headings are: Task, Point Person, Deadline, and Notes. Each row lists a different task, and includes details about which partner has volunteered to handle that task, by what date. If anything else needs to be remembered, it can be included as a “note”—for example the address of a meeting, or the phone number of a donor. You can create an action plan as a Word document or Excel spreadsheet, updating it in meetings. Or you can share it online with your partners through a Google document or spreadsheet, which enables everyone to update it as needed from their own computer.

### Global Youth Service Day – Action Plan (March and April)

Task	Point person	Deadline	Notes
Speak at the Rotary Club, ask business owners for in-kind and cash donations for the community service awards	Perry	Meeting takes place March 15th; deadline for collecting donations is April 1st	March 15th, 12 noon – Hiawatha Hotel Conference Room B (2nd Fl.) – 1280 Greystop Road; bring talking points Fiona emailed on 2/25
Select books from the library for the literacy project; we'll need at least 30 books	Johanna (St. Johns branch) and Ed (Central branch)	Within three weeks of Global Youth Service Day	Looking for books targeting kids ages 5-10; themes of volunteering, community leaders, and kids doing good for their neighborhoods

### Turning community partners into your career network

Through initiating and maintaining partnerships during your term of service, you'll establish relationships that will not only benefit your project's mission but help you successfully move on in your career when your term ends.

As you begin to explore your professional next steps, tap your community partners for advice. Go back to them for more informational interviewing. Again, do not ask for a job, but rather ask questions about their career path, their educational history, and any advice they may have for you. Turn to your advisory board members individually for career guidance. Through all of these conversations, keep an eye out for potential mentors.

If you have done a good job during your term, you should have a lot of people you can call on for references—people who have seen you in action, who have faith in you, and who might hire you if they could.

If you are planning to stay in the area, community partners will have their ear to the ground when it comes to new job openings—so make your career goals known to them. If you plan to move away, ask whom they know elsewhere.



## More ways to bolster your professional network

In addition to the community partnerships you'll develop during your term, you'll encounter and seek out other relationships.

Developing relationships with students, organizational clients, and other community members will open your eyes to contributions you can make during your term and beyond. Listen to the voices of the people you are engaged in service with, learn their stories. If your hope is to give something of yourself to them, allow them to guide you—what is it that they need? How can you best offer your energy and support? Their answers may inform your decisions about your next steps, but also the education and long-term vision you have for yourself.

Additionally, each of your peers in the service corps are emerging leaders. Grow together—lean on each other now, online or in person, as time permits. As your term ends, you'll have a true web of mutual support to give to and take from as needed throughout your life. Likewise, look to connect more deeply to your host site colleagues and service corps staff as an active contributor and team member. Actively participating in your service corps-affiliated networks allows you to learn and share news and resources. It can also introduce you to new people in other networks, exponentially expanding the community web you're a part of.

Sometimes, you may need to reach out to other people specifically for your career exploration and development, in order to get a better understanding of your field and its job prospects.

Following the advice in Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*, consider your professional goals and seek out networks that will educate you about trends, lingo, and leaders in your field. Professional associations and civic organizations are some of the obvious places to find practicing professionals in any given field.

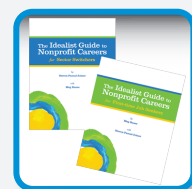
If you aim to go into a field that doesn't seem to have an association to join, try calling a local, relevant graduate school and ask to be put in touch with some local alumni. The alumni may be willing to meet you for an informational interview, and may be connected with informal networking groups for your field.

Finally, ask for help from people you know through other community groups—such as your place of worship, recreational sports club, or coop grocery.

### IF YOUR REFERENCES ARE ABROAD...

Keep in mind that if you are serving in another country, you might have a few extra things to think about when asking people to serve as a reference. Once you have left your host country after your service term, you may encounter communication challenges. It may be difficult to connect with former colleagues and ask for letters of recommendation, for example. Consider asking for recommendation letters from host country nationals while you are still in-country.

Also be aware that the custom around recommendation letters in your host country may differ significantly from what employers (or others) in your home country are used to reading. For example, your supervisor might include factual information about your service dates and responsibilities, but not shower you with (deserved) praise. In order to secure the best possible reference, it's a good idea to provide an example of the kind of letter you are hoping for; or else ask permission to look over the letter before passing it along to a graduate admissions committee or potential employer.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Four of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) covers the ins and outs of networking.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)





## Alternative and long-distance networking

At any given time, thousands of service corps participants are serving in foreign countries or very isolated parts of their own country. Thousands more plan to move away from their service site once they have finished their term. If you fit either of these descriptions, building community partnerships with a wide array of relevant professional mentors may not be a realistic part of your service. You may need different tactics to network successfully during your term.

This is not to imply that the only reason to get to know people is to strategize for your next career steps. *Of course* you want to make strong friendships in your community for a wide range of reasons, least of which is career exploration. This discussion aims to expand on ways to build professionally advantageous relationships when you are in special circumstances.

If you are in a situation where relevant professional contacts are more difficult to come by, here are some suggestions for ways to build valuable relationships to benefit your career development. You may need to be more creative and curious than usual.

### Exhaust local connections first

Especially if you plan to leave town once your term ends, locals may not help you land that first job as a former corps member. That said, you'll stay more engaged in your host community if you find out what's going on there in your field, as opposed to spending a lot of time online, detached from human interaction. Your "host community" may mean your town, your county, your state or province, or even your whole host country. Investigating the local news and trends in your field also better educates you about your host community, and you'll carry that expertise with you during your service and beyond.

Also connect with other people who are not native to the area. Discuss your career aspirations with other volunteers or corps members, your service program's staff, foreign service officers stationed in the regional or national capital of your host country, other expats—professionals, students—who live in the region, and travelers and other newcomers to your area who may carry insights from elsewhere.

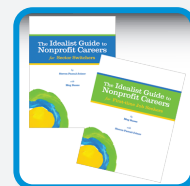
Here are some ideas:

- Speak with practitioners in your field, or the closest equivalent, if you can. For example, if you are interested in careers in public health, spend time with local clinic workers, or NGO and government health workers. If you hope to work in business development, spend time with small business owners—even food cart owners have to manage supply chains, market themselves, and turn a profit. Be

### THE BROADER VIEW OF NETWORKING

As you get creative about how you network professionally in a remote location, it may be helpful to keep the end goals of networking in mind. Don't limit yourself to chatting with people who know where to find jobs in your field, or who can give you advice about your resume or grad school options. Think about the broader view of networking, which can help you:

- Open up a mutually beneficial dialogue, sharing news and opportunities as often as gleaning them.
- Learn more about a field that interests you—what is it really like, what are the day-to-day tasks of the job, what are the advantages and challenges, what kind of person excels in that environment?
- Hear advice from professionals in your target field.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Six of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) examines long-distance job search strategies and the importance of using online tools to expand your offline networking.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch6.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch6.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch6.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch6.html)





creative when you look for counterparts in your town or village. Ask questions about the tasks and challenges involved in their work, as well as the career paths that led them to it. You might gain wisdom from a new perspective.

- To get connected with local practitioners, start with networks you are already part of, like faculty at the school where you teach, farmers at the market where you buy produce, or people in your local faith community.
- Use vacation time wisely. Make a point to meet with university faculty or NGO staff in your field when you travel through regional hub cities during vacation.
- Chat with other service corps members about their knowledge of the field, post-service opportunities, well-regarded graduate schools, and other topics of interest or relevance.
- If you are abroad, chat with foreign service officers at the consulate or embassy nearest you for contacts, and find out if any expat experts are working in your region with whom you could connect.



#### DEENA'S STORY: NETWORKING

Deena has been helping women in rural areas of Ecuador to develop business plans for home-based initiatives and to seek micro-loans to get these start-ups off the ground.

Though a former small business owner herself, she is brand new to the field of micro-enterprise development. She feels very committed to using her knowledge to help lift families out of poverty in sustainable ways. She loves what she does and wants to find a way to stay in Ecuador or another developing country where she can continue to support micro-enterprises. She wants to learn more about her field and to network with other practitioners. Given that she's limited by a lack of access to internet and telephone, she plans to do most of her networking in person and by writing letters.

She starts by talking with her counterpart Patricia, an Ecuadoran woman who is on the staff of Deena's host agency, an NGO that prepares local businesses for the micro-loan application process. Patricia is familiar with the agencies and loan officers that offer micro-loans in Ecuador. She is also familiar with an NGO in another part of the country that does similar work to her own. Over the course of her second year in-country, Deena makes a point to meet the people Patricia has connected her with.

Most of Deena's time is spent with families in rural villages who are interested in starting up or expanding small businesses. During her travels in the region, she's heard of at least a dozen women who've already successfully launched small businesses. Deena makes a point to spend time with these women, to learn more about their challenges and successes. She also realizes that some of the women worked with associations and organizations Deena hasn't heard of,



## DEENA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

so she makes sure to follow up with these other groups to find out how they work and to meet key people there.

Additionally, Deena remembers that during her pre-service training, she met Veronica, a U.S. foreign service officer at the embassy in Quito who had been essential in creating the agreement with the Ecuadoran government for Deena's service corps to operate there. Veronica is about to return to the United States, but before she does, she makes the trip to Deena's service site to see how the program is running and to meet some of Deena's clients. While Veronica is there, Deena asks for recommended NGO and government contacts. Veronica knows most of the micro-enterprise agencies working in Quito, the capital city, and is glad to pass on the information to Deena. Deena also asks her about serving with the U.S. government. After Veronica returns to the United States, Deena keeps up correspondence with her and sends updates about her work—through letters and occasionally through email when she can get online. Deena also follows up with Veronica's leads the next time she travels to Quito.

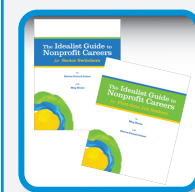
Deena is an effective networker both for her service site and its clients, as well as her future career prospects, by seeking out people locally to learn from, following up with the people she's met and their contacts, and asking a broad range of questions that go beyond what she thinks are her current career goals.

## Connect online

As with any networking effort, connect over email starting with people you know and groups you are already a part of. Ask for help connecting to people who can answer your questions about your target field. If you are heading to a new city, you can also survey your friends, relatives, professors, and former employers for people they may know in your destination. For more ideas about whom to connect with, refer to Chapters Four and Six of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

Very often, the **alumni of your service program** will be open to hearing from you. If you aren't aware of your program's alumni networks, be sure to ask program staff for your corps, or other corps members serving in your area. Don't be shy about tapping into a different group's alumni networks either. For example, if you are overseas with Jesuit Volunteers International, feel free to reach out to a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer group through the National Peace Corps Association, as well as your own former JVI—RPCVs will likely welcome the chance to support you. Alumni of your college, fraternity or sorority, and other groups may also be helpful to you.

If you are a person of faith, tap into **networks that faith communities offer**, such



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

For networking tips, see

**Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)

**Chapter Six** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) can help you with a long-distance job search.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
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## ALUMNI GROUPS FOR SERVICE CORPS

Access a list of service corps alumni groups on Idealist.org at [www.idealists.org/service](http://www.idealists.org/service).



as people you know from your places of worship back home or at college, and faith groups you want to join after your term ends. Let people know what you are doing by writing letters, or contributing an article to a monthly newsletter, the community's blog, or the weekly bulletin that is given out at services. Stay in touch generally, and when you have a clear sense of what your next steps will be, ask to be put in touch with the right mentors.

Research what you can through **professional associations** in your field, and reach out to people where you feel that you can. For example, some associations have a mentor-match program. Even if you can't participate (for example, if you are not a member of the association), the person in charge of making matches may be open to helping you connect with interested contacts. Remember to mention that you are in a service corps, which may earn you extra good will.

Next, try finding people through general **social networking sites** online. Do-gooder social networking sites like Idealist.org, as well as broader sites like Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and blogs, all connect people across shared interests. The people you meet in this realm may just become intermediaries for you and you'll be extending your network, perhaps getting referrals to people who you want to know but who might not be so active online. As always, be generous with your own connections and resources, and offer leads as often as you take them.



#### ED'S STORY: NETWORKING

Ed is teaching in a Chinese community college during his term of service. At 70, his next steps will involve moving to Portland, OR to live in semi-retirement near his daughter and her family. He has saved enough money through the years that he thinks he'll do fine financially without taking a job—but he aims to get a part-time job or volunteer stint nonetheless to stay involved. As he enters his second and final year of service, he starts to wonder what opportunities might await him in Portland. Unlike Deena, Ed has a laptop and an internet connection in his apartment. He also has a phone and can use it to call the United States.

He starts by emailing his daughter and asking her to find out how people learn about nonprofit jobs and volunteer opportunities in Portland. In addition to Idealist, she sends him a few other websites and email listservs to join. She suggests he join LinkedIn and Facebook, just for fun.

Before Ed left for China, blogging was becoming more mainstream. He had assigned his students in Pittsburgh to start their own blogs, and through that experience, he learned that blogs can become lightning rods for community

## ED'S STORY (CONTINUED)

building. Therefore, from his apartment in China, he searches for blogs in Portland that can shed light on the civically engaged community there. As he finds these blogs, he subscribes to them in Google Reader (the way he kept up with his students' blogs in Pittsburgh), and comments on blog posts that inspire his input. He also searches for online communities of military veterans, and the alumni groups of his current service corps. In this way he begins to make allies in Portland—people who are willing to share information with him. As he makes these friends, he adds them to Facebook and LinkedIn.

He notices that some of his new friends update their Facebook status through Twitter, the micro-blogging website that allows people to send updates about their work and meet others with similar interests. With a little research he figures out that Twitter is another way to connect with new people who share his interests in Portland and elsewhere. He searches Twitter posts for keywords that are meaningful to him, like “education,” “China,” and the name of his service corps. Gradually (it takes a few months) he finds people throughout the world who offer ideas and insights for what he can do to occupy his time in retirement, including volunteering for Free Geek, an NGO that refurbishes computers, and exploring the microbrew scene in Portland.

Operating completely online, Ed creates a network for himself in his new hometown, even before he arrives there. By taking advantage of his knowledge of how to connect with people through blogs, Twitter, and other social networking websites, Ed is able to orient himself to a city he's never lived in before, in order to smooth his transition home.

## Make contact

After canvassing your own network and new social networking contacts, use email, online chat (such as Skype, Google Voice and Video Chat, or AOL Instant Messaging), or old-fashioned mail to attempt to connect with people in your field and/or in your destination city.

Some people may be unresponsive. The most effective approach is to mention a personal referral or mutual connection, as in, “[Your former colleague] Jenny Houser suggested I connect with you,” or to mention which group you have in common, “I am also an alum of Appalachian State.” It's hard to emphasize enough just how far a shared acquaintance or group will go towards greasing the wheels of long-distance relationship building.

After clarifying your personal connection, you should be able to transition into your “elevator pitch” quite seamlessly (see sidebar).

## ELEVATOR PITCHES

If you were in an elevator actually talking with a potential employer, your normally quick elevator ride would seem even shorter as you tried to convey why you are the perfect candidate for a job. If, however, you have prepared and practiced a concise, persuasive statement conveying your best attributes in approximately 30 seconds, then that short ride would be more than enough time to articulate your value.

When you first meet a person you'd like to remember you, it's handy to have a few talking points ready to share—so you remember to say what's important, and so you sound focused. These talking points are also called your elevator pitch.

You will use your elevator pitch for informational interviews, networking events, or chance meetings. No matter where you are, you will want to be able to succinctly state who you are, what you are looking for, and how the person you're speaking with could help you. If done well, 30-45 seconds is plenty of time to convey your need without losing your audience's attention. Always try to be brief. This will leave more time for a conversation with your new contact around ways that you can help one another out.

Read more about the elevator pitch in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.



## Etiquette

When you first reach out to people via email, blogs, or social networking sites, be polite and brief. Show that you respect their busy lives. Leave only thoughtful, professional comments on blog posts. Keep your questions few and fairly narrow—busy professionals may not have time to write essays in response to broad questions. Use these contacts strategically to get information you couldn't get through web searches, and plan to follow up with them in person when you are in their area. Keep them in the loop as you begin new opportunities. You never know when you might be a resource for them.

As with a face-to-face informational interview, do not ask for a job. Do not attach your resume and ask for feedback or for them to let you know if they see anything for you. You may be able to do that *after* you have a relationship with them, *after* they ask to see your resume. If you don't hear back from someone within a couple weeks (via email) or months (via regular mail), politely follow up.

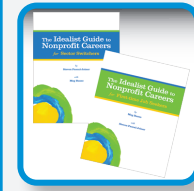
## Relationships really make a difference

Building relationships can be the key to success in both your corps experience and your career transition. Becoming well-connected within your community or field can strengthen your marketing and outreach efforts, because of the strength of word-of-mouth advertising. It increases the credibility of your work and your job applications when you have community leaders or experts in the field who are willing to back you up to their peers. Knowing the right people can give you a leg up in a range of ways—learning about new sources of funding, getting connected to other people relevant to your project, hearing about the training you need, and finding out where the jobs are posted. The time you invest in your network now can benefit you—and them—for the rest of your career, even if you're planning to move away. And with social networking sites online like Idealist, Facebook, and LinkedIn, staying connected with people after your service has ended is easier than ever.

## Section four: Documenting your successes

Another vital part of your service experience is to keep records of your accomplishments *now* to share *later*, during job and admissions applications. This section discusses what you can track and collect during your term that will be valuable to share with your supervisors and funders now, as well as with potential employers later on.

“Records” refers to everything from statistics on your achievements, to writing samples, to screenshots of websites you helped design or photographs of you or your constituents in action.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Eleven of *The*

*Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) has useful advice about maintaining contacts and staying ready for future transitions.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch11.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch11.html)



**Building  
relationships  
can be the key  
to success in  
both your corps  
experience and  
your career  
transition.”**



Remember, it is always much easier to keep track of your accomplishments as they are happening and fresh in your mind rather than trying to recall them a year or two later.

Finally, your motivation for committing to a term of service likely did not include keeping score of all of your good deeds. In case the discussion of documenting your service feels self-aggrandizing, keep in mind that it's not about competing with other corps members, or boasting about your accomplishments. It's one way to keep moving in the direction of making positive contributions to the world, by showing what you are capable of.

## Documenting the facts of your service with statistics

At the very least, keep track of your statistics and numbers. What numbers you track will depend on your type of service. For example, the number of hours of training you've received is a common statistic.

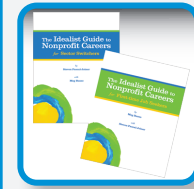
If you are a teacher, tutor, after-school coordinator, or trainer, keep track of figures such as numbers of students or participants, the increase in grades and test scores from baseline assessments at the start of year, the number of classroom volunteers you recruited and managed, etc. If you are a project developer, keep track of dollars you raised, community partnerships you developed, clients your program served, meetings you facilitated, volunteers you recruited and managed, and so on.

A great way to measure the impact of your service is not only to count your direct constituents, but also the indirect beneficiaries of your service.

Two examples:

- A person like Ed who teaches English to college students should consider both the assistance he's offered to the students, as well as the benefit of the students' strengthened language skills to their careers, future children, and the community.
- Someone like Bea who is increasing the nutritional value of the food in public school cafeterias can count the direct benefits to the farmers (in income), schools (in pounds of produce throughout the season and in financial savings), and the children (hours of instruction time saved because the kids aren't out sick as often).

When you are ready to transition, use at least some of the statistics you track in your resume and in anecdotes about the outcomes of your service. Numbers help a hiring



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

When they're relevant to a

position you're pursuing, the facts and artifacts of your service should be reflected in your resume and cover letter. **Chapter Eight** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) offers guidance on writing resumes and cover letters.

**First-time Job Seekers version**

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html)

**Sector Switchers version**

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html)

Similarly, when you go for a job interview you can use facts and statistics to help demonstrate your aptitude for the position. **Chapter Nine** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) is all about preparing for the interview.

**First-time Job Seekers version**

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html)

**Sector Switchers version**

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html)

**Chapter Eleven** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) offers tips on continually tracking your successes so that you're prepared for the next opportunity.

**First-time Job Seekers version**

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html)

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manager or admissions committee put your resume into context and understand the impact of your work.

## Documenting the artifacts of your service in a portfolio

One way to present the artifacts of your service is to create a portfolio—similar to a professional scrapbook—of your service term, with sections for each skill set you have built or employed. Portfolios aren't just for artists, models, and designers!

The portfolio can start off with your position description and/or work plan, your resume, your Description of Service (for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers), constructive performance evaluations, letters of recommendation, workshop evaluations, and thank you notes or emails that describe the impact of your service from colleagues, community partners, and others.

Skill sets to include may be anything from trail and house building to grantwriting, event planning, curricula development and teaching, program development, volunteer management, and more. Be sure to connect the dots between your experiences and transferable skill sets. For example, digging wells in the Dominican Republic may not look all that useful for work in an urban homeless shelter, but team management, project coordination, meeting deadlines, and coming in under budget are all skills that any employer looks for.

### Mini-portfolios to leave behind

Rather than taking the whole portfolio to interviews with you, you can reproduce relevant sections and leave them behind at the interview, for the hiring manager or admissions counselor to look at on their own time. It's best to offer only a few samples of your work, and wait till you are prompted to offer recommendation letters or reference contacts.

### Online portfolios

Alternately, you can create an online portfolio like Beth Kanter—a guru of social media for nonprofits—has done: <http://bethkanter.wikispaces.com>. Whether on your own website, a personal blog, or through a tool like Wikispaces (public spaces are free), it's affordable and easy to build an online portfolio. Include the link to the portfolio on your resume and cover letters with the rest of your contact information.

Online portfolios are especially impressive if you've used multimedia to document your service. Linking to your audio or video podcast on iTunes or YouTube is easier if your portfolio is already online. Visit [www.idealistservice.org](http://www.idealistservice.org) to view sample portfolios.

### SHOWING ONLINE CONTENT IN YOUR PORTFOLIO

A warning: Keep in mind that if you have designed webpages or developed web content as part of your service project, capturing an image of the webpage through a screenshot is still the best route for documentation. Linking to the webpages directly is risky because once you've left your service site, you won't know if your webpages will be updated, if links have broken, or if your pages will have been removed altogether. Because you have no control over the pages after you are gone, it's best to preserve them visually through a screenshot rather than linking to them.

Take a screenshot on a PC by pressing PrtScn (print screen), which copies an image of your active screen to your clipboard; then open a document in Word or any graphics application and paste it. You will likely want to crop it to make it the size you'd like, or to focus on a specific part of the screen. On a Mac, Shift+Command+4 will allow you to select any portion of your screen and save it as a JPG file that you can later import to a document or even a blog post.

If the *functionality* of your web design is important for prospective employers to see, you may want to keep a working version of the site on your computer, a flash drive, or a CD-ROM. This way, upon request, you can share the site with all its bells and whistles preserved. It is important to be aware of the host site's policy about such copying, and you should be careful not to copy confidential intranet content or sensitive client data.

Finally, check out the **Wayback Machine** ([www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) which allows you to look at webpages on specific dates going back as far as 1996.



## Writing samples

Writing samples are great to include in your portfolio, and they're also useful in sharing with potential employers and graduate admissions staff. Depending on your position, you should have a chance to collect a variety of samples. Anything professional you've written should work—grant proposals (with permission from your host organization), brochures and newsletters, formal emails or letters, project descriptions, focus group or survey summary reports, web content, press releases, and so on.

If you are in a direct service role with few opportunities to write, try to create a reason to write tied to your service, like a narrative summary of your service or a specific service project, letters home to parents, reports you submit that track your accomplishments, an essay you submitted to a contest, or a guest blog post you authored.

## Hanging on to your documentation

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A problem many service corps alumni face is that they've saved all these documents on the computer at their old service site, and now that they are finished, they can't access them easily to share during the job or school search. Save yourself this potential heartache by emailing documents and photographs to your personal email account, or backing them up on a thumb drive or CD-ROM—if you have permission to do so from your host agency. If you've posted documents and photos using online tools like Google Docs and Flickr, you can also access these later on.

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers can request a photocopy of their Document of Service from Peace Corps, to be sent to them directly or to their hiring manager or graduate admissions office. (Peace Corps keeps your DOS for 60 years.) Other service corps may offer similar support—it's worth checking with your program.

Documenting your service is not just useful for your next steps. Keeping good records during your term can help inform grantwriting, monthly reporting, communicating with your supervisor and funders, preparing for your mid-term or end-of-service performance evaluations, and creating public relations materials for your program.

Furthermore, when you are looking back on your service term several months or years after it ends, the documentation you've squirreled away will serve as templates for handling future projects. In coming years, your documentation can also serve as a reminder, triggering realizations like how much your constituents and team mates meant to you, and how much you were able to accomplish in a relatively short term of service.



## The records they saved

In order to document their service, each of our archetypal characters held on to artifacts and statistics. Below is a sampling:

### Ace:

- The impact, in numbers, of the weatherizing projects he worked on. How much money and energy he helped his clients save, for example. One of the homeowners Ace worked with even volunteered to let him copy some energy bills from before and after the weatherization, as long as Ace blacked out his name and address.
- An article from the neighborhood newspaper featuring him and his work
- Letters of recommendation from his mentor and a client

### Bea:

- Sample budgets and menus she helped the cafeteria workers create
- Photographs of the buffet before and after she connected the school with local farmers
- Thank you notes and drawings from the fourth graders who visited a farm on a field trip

### Cesar:

- Anthology of his students' short stories (fiction and non-fiction), bound and distributed to the local community
- Grant reports he wrote, including narrative and numerical updates about his work and his class's achievements
- Screenshots of a website he developed to quiz his students about citizenship topics they'd need to master for the citizenship test
- Photographs of him leading his adult students on different projects, both one-on-one and in front of the classroom

### Deena:

- Copy of the agenda of a typical meeting Deena held when she arrived in a new village, to educate women about starting their own small businesses
- Descriptions and photographs of each woman she helped, their business model, their initial loan amount, and length of time to repay (either estimates or actual)
- Thank you letter from a woman who conceived of and implemented her new business with Deena's assistance

### Ed:

- Photographs of his class at work, and of him leading discussions
- All lesson plans and completed homework assignments from a unit on autobiography he taught in a reading class
- A guest column he wrote for his hometown newspaper about his experience in China



# Conclusion

Your term of service will offer your host community so many gifts, including that of your time, passion, and energy. The term will also bring valuable gifts to you—opportunities to meet new people, good reasons to practice new skills, and time to think about the direction you'd like your life to go in. Taking advantage of these opportunities and documenting your achievements are some of the best ways to prepare for your next steps, whatever they may be.



## SUMMARY

It's critical to take steps during your term of service that will strengthen and simplify your future transition to a social impact career or related pursuit.

First, carve out time to **discern your professional calling** (pages 11-17). Doing so will help you not only to focus your work during your service but also to prioritize the multitude of potential paths and opportunities that await you post-service. You can use a range of tools, from research and evaluation to self-assessment exercises and reflection, meditation, or prayer.

As you sharpen your focus through discernment, you'll be able to ascertain which skills you need to build to move toward your professional calling. The time you spend in your service corps is a valuable chance to **build skills** (pages 18-31). These may range from developing basic work skills (if this is your first professional experience) to obtaining specific knowledge and capacities required to work in your intended field. Look for opportunities to build skills while on the job, but also seek out other sources of knowledge, such as attending workshops or online webinars.

Your service corps will bring you into contact with a range of people in your community and beyond. **Building relationships** (pages 31-43) with these people through partnerships and other forms of networking affords you an opportunity to enhance your service project *and* to lay the groundwork for your future transition. There are many ways to cultivate relationships with people who can help you succeed—just remember that networking is a two-way street!

As you accomplish objectives during your service term, take time to **document your successes** (pages 43-47). Track your accomplishments and save examples of your work—these will be invaluable resources for you in the future when you seek to demonstrate your experience and transferable skills to potential employers or admissions staff at colleges and universities.

## You are here

- This is **Part One**. The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealists.org/servicecompanion](http://www.idealists.org/servicecompanion).

### About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

**Action Without Borders** is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. [Idealist.org](http://Idealist.org), a project of Action Without Borders, is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, find opportunities and supporters, and turn their good intentions into action.

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career—A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* by Amy Potthast is a product of Action Without Borders' Careers and Service Team based in Portland, OR. This team works to support individuals and organizations with graduate education options; HR and volunteer management resources; and job, internship, and domestic and global volunteer opportunities. Published in 2009 by Action Without Borders.



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# PART TWO



## During your transition

### Making the switch from service to social impact work

#### Part Two Overview

Part Two is useful both for people nearing the end of their service corps as well as those who have already completed their term (if you already finished your term and just found this book, see the box on page 88). Part Two discusses the following topics:

- **Section one: Motivation and courage in the transition** (pages 51-52)
  - \* Includes a pep talk (page 51) and advice on how to activate your network to help your transition (pages 51-52)
- **Section two: The challenges of your transition** (pages 53-67)
  - \* Includes discussions of a range of challenges you may face during your transition, such as “selling” yourself to hiring managers (pages 53-54), choosing which jobs to apply for (page 54), embracing opportunities that may seem daunting (page 54), timing your job search (page 55), deciding whether to stay in your service program if opportunities arise before it's over (pages 56-59), looking for jobs from a distance (page 60), living on less income during the transition (pages 61-65), and keeping your health insured (page 67)
- **Section three: Translating your experience** (pages 68-82)
  - \* Includes discussions of introducing your service corps to potential employers (pages 68-69), creating a resume and cover letter (pages 69-70), putting your experience across in an interview (pages 70-71), helpful frameworks to organize your experience (pages 72-75), a list of assumptions employers may make about your service background (pages 75-77), discussing your service work if you're mid-career or beyond (pages 77-78), discussing an early termination of your service term (pages 79-81), and tying your experience to your salary negotiations (pages 81-82)
- **Section four: Other options for your next steps** (pages 83-87)
  - \* Includes discussions of committing to a second service term (pages 83-84), finding work in government (pages 84-86) or business (pages 86-87), furthering your education (page 87), and starting your own organization (page 87)

Part Two of this *Companion* supports currently serving and recently finished corps members who are transitioning from corps to career. It's focused on the time leading up to, as well as the months following, the end of your service.

Part Two starts out with a pep talk that we encourage you to return to throughout your





transition if you find it helpful. Then it addresses the many challenges you may face, providing a series of action steps to help you overcome them. It offers you a framework for translating your service experience on paper (on your resume and in your cover letter) as well as in person (in interviewing, negotiating your salary, and networking).

Throughout, Part Two refers to resources on Idealist.org that can help you with your career transition, and also presents new resources designed specifically for you.

## Section one: Motivation and courage in the transition

### Pep talk: Read early and often

This section is for people who, deep down inside, fear that they will not be able to get the job they want. It's for people who might feel terrified when they think about applying for grad school. For people who doubt they will ever find a career that allows them to pursue their life's calling while earning a living wage. It's for people who dread the questions, "What are you going to do when your term of service ends?" and "Are you going to get a real job next year?" and "What do you want to do with your life?" If you have a hard time answering any or all of the above questions, this section is for you.

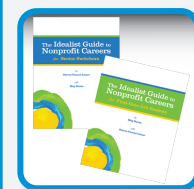
Here are some important things you should know about yourself:

- You deserve to take the next steps necessary to live out your thoughtful vision of your life.
- You deserve to find a place to go to school, to work, or to serve where your professors, employers, classmates, and colleagues appreciate your professional strengths and your personality.
- You deserve to have confidence in yourself.
- You deserve to succeed.

Your term of service has offered you opportunities to grow, learn, and give back. These opportunities, as well as the experiences you brought with you when you joined, will all play a role in helping you with your next steps.

### Kicking your network into high gear during the transition

You have likely spent some time and effort building a network of people to work with during your term of service. You may have connected with some of these people locally, while you connected with others online, through email, letters, or telephone. While your intentions may have been more focused on getting your service project done well, you can now look to your professional



#### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Some of the psychological

ups and downs of the job search are explored in **Chapter Two** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch2.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch2.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch2.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch2.html)

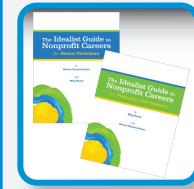


## Kicking your network into high gear... (continued)

partners to help guide or support your next steps. Here are some ways to call on your network to help you in your transition:

- Let the people in your network know what you hope to do next. Since they will ask you, prepare an “elevator pitch”—a short but compelling story about your plans post-service (see the discussion in [Part One](#) of this *Companion*, page 42). Also feel free to email people (individually is best) to thank them for their partnership during your term, concluding with your vision for your life after the corps
- Ask for an informational interview. You may have already sat down with them to chat. This time, explore their career paths. Let them know what you plan for your next steps, and get their advice. Discuss the experiences and skills you’ve developed and hope to use, and ask if they have other ideas for how to proceed. Find out what education you might need to achieve your goals—you might have an idea about this, based on your own research. What do they think? Ask what the job market is like in your field, and where jobs are posted. See Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* where you’ll find suggested questions—never ask for a job—as well as ways of approaching people for informational interviews, and everything else you need to know for networking.
- Ask your allies to put you in touch with other people you may want to chat with for informational interviews. Remember to mention your ally when introducing yourself to their contacts.
- Ask them to keep you in mind if they see an opportunity appropriate for you.
- Approach three to five people for their permission to be listed as references; make sure they have a copy of your resume. It may even be helpful for them to see your cover letters, so they have an idea of the positions you’re applying for, and why you are a good fit (see sidebar).
- Always send a thank you note when someone does something nice for you.
- With each outcome (a job, admission to school, rejection from either) your supporters will appreciate an update letting them know how things turned out. Don’t make them beg for news; this makes people feel like you don’t value them and instead were just using them to get ahead. Also, letting them know how and what you’re doing expands their network. With an update, they now have a new contact to refer people to, ask advice from, and contact for people in your new network.

The partners you cultivated during your term may be your greatest champions during your transition because they see your potential, enjoy helping people in their network, and ultimately, want to see you succeed.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Informational interviews

are discussed in detail in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)

## CHOOSING REFERENCES

Ask people who know your work well to serve as references. A common mistake is to choose someone with a lofty title who knows you a little, but not well enough to speak in detail about your accomplishments and strengths. Hiring managers and admissions professionals value hearing from someone who can share specific details about your work ethic and your goals for the future. From their point of view, a specific reference from a colleague who knows you well is much more valuable than generic information from someone with an impressive title. A caveat is that you *should*, however, ask someone to serve as a reference if they know the hiring manager and can go to bat for you in an authentic way.

To learn more about how to approach people to write letters of reference for grad school admissions (or fellowships), go to the Idealist.org **Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center**:  
[www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/application2.html#letters](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/application2.html#letters)



## Section two: The challenges of your transition

Warning: the discussion below may be disturbing to some readers.

Some of the questions and difficult tasks you face during your transition are outlined in this section and discussed further in the coming pages. While the opportunities awaiting you are exciting and real, so are some of the trials you'll undergo. The goal is not to scare you, but to address concerns you might have. Feel free to skip ahead if a point of concern does not resonate with you.

### Issues you may be facing during your transition

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Because you've recently been participating in a term of service, this transition is different from other career transitions you have made or will make in your life.

Some challenges of your current transition may be include:

- “Selling” yourself to a potential employer
- Choosing jobs wisely
- Embracing opportunities rather than shying away from them
- Timing your job search
- Hanging in there in your service program as the job search beckons
- Looking for a job from a distance
- Living on even less money (until the new job starts)
- Finding (or keeping) affordable health insurance

### Selling yourself long

Everyone you've been serving with already knows your talent, your work ethic, and your intelligence. You've grown as a leader during your term, developed and solidified your skill sets. But you may be put off by the idea of “selling” the hiring manager on your leadership skills in high-pressure and competitive settings. It's also natural to feel awkward advocating for yourself in your resume, interviews, and salary negotiations—after all, your motivations to serve may not have included self-promotion. Finally, you may question whether a hiring manager will take your application seriously, since you've not been a permanent member of staff at your host organization.

#### Action steps

- Beginning on page 68 you can read about how to translate your service experience during a job or school search. Many corps members relax once they know they can talk about their accomplishments.



While the opportunities awaiting you are exciting and real, so are some of the trials you'll undergo.”



- Corps members who are motivated by their moral convictions and faith often have a particularly hard time using their service as a stepping stone to a salaried job. If you feel this way, know that you are not dishonoring the service by seeking to move into employment that allows you to also work for a greater purpose.
- For more tips on crafting your resume and preparing for the interview, check out Chapters Eight and Nine of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.
- Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*, on networking, will help you start any conversation off right through a prepared elevator pitch.

## Choosing jobs wisely

Whether this transition is your first targeted or professional job search, or you've held many professional jobs in the past, it's possible that through your service you've sharpened your sense of what you'd like to do with the rest of your life.

### Action steps

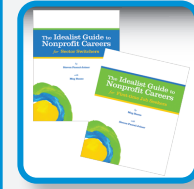
- Use your focus to your advantage by carefully choosing jobs to apply for.
- Emphasize quality applications—a relevant cover letter and resume for each opening you apply for—over quantity, sending out identical resumes to every organization that's hiring.
- Don't cave in to pressure to meet a minimum quota of resumes to send out weekly as a strategy for landing a job. Again, quality over quantity.
- Read more about discerning your career path from page 11 in [Part One](#) of this *Companion*. You must take the time to discover what you want to do, search out opportunities to do it, and find jobs that are the right fit. Only then can you convince a hiring manager that you really want the job.

## Running toward opportunities, not away from them

Always make decisions based on the merits of each opportunity, rather than to avoid a tougher challenge. Given the pressure you may feel right now, and the open-ended nature of a job search, alternatives may appeal to you for the wrong reasons. Enlisting in another term of service or applying to college or grad school, for example, can seem easier because the application processes are more straightforward and the start dates more definite than a job search. Both are legitimate options, just make sure you are clear about your aims in pursuing them, as well as their potential drawbacks.

### Action steps

- On page 83 in Part Two of this *Companion* is a discussion about committing to a second term of service for the right reasons (there are plenty).
- Read good and bad reasons to go to graduate school in Idealist's Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center ([www.idealistservice.org/gradschool](http://www.idealistservice.org/gradschool)).
- As for college—it's always a good time to get your undergraduate degree.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

### Chapter Eight of The

*Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) is all about writing strong resumes and effective cover letters.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html)

**Chapter Nine** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) will help you make the right impression at your interview.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html)

Learn how to craft your “elevator pitch” in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealistservice.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)



## Timing your job search

Your term probably has a definite end date. The upside is that you know when you will be available for your next opportunity, and you can plan accordingly. The downside is that lining up a job can pose tricky questions, such as when do you start applying for jobs? When during the application process do you let the hiring team know your availability? If you are offered a job early, do you consider quitting your term before completion?

When to start your active job search—sending in applications—is a little fuzzy. The typical job search takes about six months. But if you get a job offer two months before the end of your term, you may put yourself and the hiring organization in a bind. Do they wait for you? Do you sever ties with your program, service site, and clients by ending your term early? That said, if you wait too long, you may still be looking for a job months after your term ends, raising logistical problems like paying your rent.

### Action steps

- Start applying within about six to eight weeks of your final day with the service corps. That way if you are offered a position, the hiring organization won't have to wait too long for you to start—and you won't have to wait too long post-term to collect a new paycheck.
- Include your available start date in your cover letter or share the information during the (first) interview. Mentioning it earlier in the process may be perceived as presumptuous; but mentioning it later can be seen as hiding info from the hiring team, especially if your term doesn't end for a while.
- Read about the decision to terminate your service early on the next page of this *Companion*.
- Starting on page 61 you'll find some suggestions for staying afloat financially in case of a protracted post-term job search.



**Start applying for jobs about six to eight weeks from the last day of your service term.”**



### BEA'S STORY: TIMING THE JOB SEARCH

Bea, who has been connecting local organic farmers with public schools, is looking for opportunities to continue working on sustainability and food issues after her term of service ends.

Two months before she is due to leave the school district, her mentor Julia tells her about a job that would draw on many of the skills and networks Bea's developed this past year. A nonprofit called Farm Adventure has been piloting a summer camp and after-school trips that have brought a small number of children to tour the farm fields, listen to farmers talk about their work, and



## BEA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

cook with vegetables. Farm Adventure has received funding to expand their program called Kids2Farm. The expansion will include more farms, serve more children, and even start daytime visits to farms through field trips and working with home-schooling groups.

At this stage in her career, coordinating these projects truly represents Bea's dream job. She would be able to leverage all of her relationships with the farmers she's met this year—which she hopes will increase her chances of getting the job. She knows people at most of the elementary schools in the district, and the right people at the district offices, to enable students to participate in the program. And she would still get to help kids access more nutritious food.

The tricky part is that Bea learns of the job two months before her term ends, so she is worried that they might not hire her. She puts together a relevant cover letter and resume, shows it to Julia and her team leader Jim, and sends it in. She mentions her time constraint in the cover letter. To be on the safe side Bea asks Julia—who knows Farm Adventure's executive director—to put in a good word for her and to find out what the time frame is for bringing on the new hire.

Several weeks later, word comes from Julia that Farm Adventure will start scheduling interviews in the coming weeks. By the time they ask Bea for an interview, a month has passed since the application deadline. After a first and second round of interviews, a couple weeks more pass. Two weeks before her term ends, Farm Adventure has checked her references and offers Bea the job. They agree that she's the ideal candidate, and don't mind waiting two more weeks for her to start.

She ends her service term on a Friday and starts her Farm Adventure position the following Monday. Although she'd been hoping to go home for a long weekend at least to see her family and to take a bit of a break, she is grateful for the short period between paychecks.

Bea **activated her service-related networks** to find her new position and **negotiated the timing** of her transition to her new job.

## TRANSPARENCY IN YOUR JOB SEARCH

If you were in a permanent job right now, you might choose to be secretive about your job search. Since your service term is ending on a specified date, however, you have no reason to hide your career transition from your host site supervisor or service corps program staff. In fact, they may be able to approve your time away from site for job interviews, help you network, and give feedback on your resume.

## Hanging in there till the end

Problems may arise if you find your dream job—or even just a next job—too early. You have good reasons to apply and you have nothing to lose, though the hiring team may not want to wait for you. If they can't wait, you will have to decide whether to quit your service program, or pass up the job offer.

If you are offered a job that is scheduled to begin before the end of your term, here





are just a few of the ways the situation could play out:

- You could ask to start your new job later than scheduled.
- Depending on your circumstances and the rules of the service corps, you may be able to work part-time in the new position until your term of service ends. Bear in mind that some corps forbid working outside the corps—if you're not sure, ask.
- Your host organization and/or service corps may be thrilled that you have found something already, and may be willing to let you go a bit early without damaging your relationship with them.

Reasons for staying in your program through the end of your term are many; maintaining the integrity of the relationships you've built is primary among them. Though you may not have signed a contract, your organization or school is counting on you. They may not be able to replace you with another corps member until next year—thus leaving your projects and constituents in limbo. Some people would say that fulfilling your commitment is simply the right thing to do—you made a promise, and now you are seeing it through.

Finishing your term also allows you to connect to your alumni group with your head held high; you also may have scholarship or other benefits coming to you that will be compromised if you leave early. (Except in very special circumstances, for example, the AmeriCorps Education Award is not prorated; if you leave early, you forfeit the entire award. See the box entitled “A VISTA asks ...” on page 58.)

Reasons to leave early may be financial, to accept a job or school opportunity simply too good to pass up, or to escape serving at a host organization that turns out to be an awful fit for you.

### Action steps

- If your issues are with your host organization or location, first explore the possibility of transferring elsewhere. Some corps are more accommodating than others.
- Before making a decision, find out the ramifications of quitting for yourself, your host organization, your projects, and your community. Note that in some service corps, bringing up the conversation is, in itself, grounds for dismissal (the idea being that you'd bring down morale for everyone).
- If you choose to exit early, be sure to make your departure as meaningful as it would be if you stayed till the end. For example, say goodbye to students, write thank you notes to colleagues, and make personal phone calls to people who supported you, to let them know of your decision. If you don't have time to do this before you leave, make an effort to do so as soon as possible afterwards.

### LEAVING EARLY: A PERSONAL STORY

I agreed to a year of service with my faith-based program (there were no contracts involved, though), and was offered a position as a campus minister after my term of service was over. In order to be on campus at least a week prior to the start of classes, I had to end my term of service a month early. I was very torn and upset with this decision. To my surprise, my program was not. They were sad to see me leave, but harbored no resentment about leaving early; they were thrilled with my job opportunity, which I really felt called to. I have since returned for a week or two at a time to do short-term work; one time I brought a group of college students with me. I joke that I am working off my last month. Depending on the program, I think it's helpful to discuss options about leaving. My program was quite flexible about when people came and left.

—Stacie, a former member of a faith-based service corps



- Collect documentation of your service effort, including statistics, writing samples, photos, and other evidence of your accomplishments (see the discussion of documenting your service in [Part One](#)). Your experience still counts, even if it was shorter than the full term.

If you've already quit your term early, you may be concerned about how to talk about your service experience since it was relatively short; you also may wonder how to request a letter of recommendation from people involved with your term of service. Those topics are addressed in the discussion on translating your experience, and on presenting yourself on paper, a little bit later on in this *Companion* on page 79.

### **A VISTA asks about accepting a job offer from her host organization before her term ends**

*Hi Amy,*

*The site where I perform my AmeriCorps VISTA service has offered me a full-time job. I am trying to decide whether I want to quit my service program now and take the job, or ask my host site to wait until my term is up in three months before hiring me. One dilemma, of course, is my education award. Do you know if the National Service Trust ever prorates the educational award? Are there any options that you might know of?*

*Also could I just take the job now, but remain an AmeriCorps VISTA member?*

*Of course, it might also be more profitable to take the job now, because I could probably make the amount of the educational award in a few months.*

*Thanks so much!*

*Torn Up*

Dear Torn Up,

Congratulations! I am really glad that your host organization recognizes your hard work and talent.

Yikes, this is a tough question. One important thing to note is, you have little chance of collecting any part of your educational award if you leave on the terms you describe.

To be perfectly clear, you can't remain an AmeriCorps VISTA member and take on the identical duties of the open position. You're not allowed to displace staff of the organization where you're serving. Because technically you are simi-



### **A VISTA asks... (continued)**

lar to a human resource grant to your host organization, your activities must align with what your supervisor described in the grant proposal they wrote to fund your VISTA position.

It would reflect very negatively on your hosting organization if they were to hire a service program participant who isn't finished with her term yet. Your organization would jeopardize getting new participants by hiring you on. I was hired by my boss at Idealist.org about three months before my AmeriCorps VISTA Leader term ended—and he waited for me! I took his willingness to wait as a sign of respect for me and for AmeriCorps VISTA.

I think asking your host organization to wait is the best option. In the long run you'll feel more of a sense of accomplishment, and you won't let down community partners who are expecting you to serve out your term. If you ever need to apply to have AmeriCorps members yourself, you and definitely your organization would be at a disadvantage were you to leave early now. You might feel awkward, too, if you one day wanted to participate in the activities of your alumni group.

If you decide to wait and your organization agrees, maybe you can change your work plan enough to tackle some of the new job tasks, as long as they are related to the grant proposal originally submitted to fund your current service position. If you want to attempt this, it's best to bring in the counsel of your VISTA program director, or someone at the appropriate state office for the Corporation for National and Community Service. (For contact information for the office responsible for your state, see [www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/directory.asp](http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/directory.asp).)

On the other hand, if you are facing more than just the typical economic hardship (i.e., if you are ruining your credit record or running up irreparable debt), the choice is also clear that you should accept the job offer. Also, if your organization isn't willing to wait for you, that might be another reason to seriously consider leaving your service year early—though again, it won't reflect well on the organization.

If you started a salaried job tomorrow, you'd have little chance of saving the full value of an educational award in three months. Most likely, once you start earning a regular salary you won't feel like you missed out by waiting.

Regardless of what you decide, you can interpret the early job offer as a clear sign that your hard work is recognized!

Good luck whatever you decide. Let me know how it works out,  
Amy



## Looking for a job from a distance

If you want to set up a job in another state or country from where you are serving, you are fortunate in that you will soon join a network of other former service corps members throughout the country—and world—who can support your move. The network of former corps members can help you overcome at least some of the long-distance job search challenges. Many wonder whether to wait before applying for jobs. If you don't line up a job right away, how will you support yourself in the intervening weeks or months?

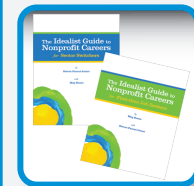
For most professionals, the long-distance job search poses challenges such as timing trips to your destination city to maximize meetings and job interviews. But as a service corps member, you may not have the money to visit your destination(s) in order to network and participate in job interviews. That limitation may result in a hiring organization taking your application less seriously.

### Action steps

- Chapter Six of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* offers great resources for your long-distance job search. [Part One](#) of this *Companion* also deals with alternative and long-distance networking which may be helpful to you during your transition.
- If possible, save your vacation days so you still have some time to travel near the end of your term when you'll be looking for a job. Be sure to check if this is okay with your service program and host site.
- Seek frequent-flyer-mile donations from friends and family. Some airlines allow people to transfer their miles to others. Your friends and family may have accrued some miles on an airline they no longer use, or have a lot of miles from an overseas flight, but not nearly enough to buy a plane ticket. Ask around and see if anyone is in a position to help you.
- If your service corps or alma mater has an alumni group in your destination city, connect with them for advice about where locals look for job postings in the nonprofit sector. Email-based listservs are popular among nonprofits and are cheap places to post jobs, but they tend to fly under the radar—the only way to find out about many of them is word-of-mouth.
- If a university in your destination city has a nonprofit management program, check with that office for information about local nonprofit job boards.
- Finally, sign up for free email alerts from Idealist.org if you haven't already—we'll send you listings for any region you're interested in as they get added to the site.



**If you don't line up a job right away, how will you support yourself?"**



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Six of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) examines long-distance job searches and strategies for networking at a distance.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch6.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch6.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch6.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch6.html)

### MORE JOB SITES

In addition to the job listings on Idealist.org, the Idealist **Career Center** contains links to a wide range of nonprofit and public service job sites.

[www.idealists.org/career](http://www.idealists.org/career)





### ED'S STORY: LONG-DISTANCE JOB SEARCHING

Ed, the retiree who's been teaching with a service corps in the interior of China, has been networking online with people in Portland, OR for the past six months.

Through his networks he's learned about CNRG (pronounced "synergy"), the Community Nonprofit Resource Group, and their website and listserv that lets nonprofits in the area post opportunities and events for free. He also learns that Portland State University's Institute on Nonprofit Management has a listserv with announcements for its students that anyone can join by request. He signs up to receive their daily digests—one email with all the announcements from the day, rather than many separate email messages with individual announcements.

One day he sees that a nonprofit computer lab for job-seeking adults is looking to hire several part-time assistants to help students with computer skills. The positions begin a month after Ed is scheduled to return home, when the summer classes start at the organization. He applies for the position, explaining in his cover letter that he's in China and would have a hard time returning for a job interview. The hiring manager at the computer lab schedules a conversation with him over Skype, a computer program that allows people to chat and even see each other, using their internet connections.

By the time Ed starts to pack his bags for his trip home, he has happily accepted the job offer. He plans to live with his daughter during the first month home, while he gets settled and looks for an apartment. His service program will provide him with an allowance to settle back in the States. He plans to live off the allowance and some savings until he starts accepting his Social Security benefits and gets on his feet with the new position.

Long before packing his bags to fly home from China, Ed started **looking online to build relevant professional networks** across the world in Portland, OR. **Using online social networking sites** and **communicating with people** who are friends with his daughter in Portland, Ed has positioned himself to hear about opportunities as they arise.

## Living on even less during your transition

As a corps member you've likely been earning a very basic allowance—possibly in a foreign currency that has even less value back in the United States. While it's a good idea to save money before a career transition, chances are you haven't had much to save. What's a person to do if a new job doesn't present itself immediately?



## Spending your readjustment allowance wisely

If you are exiting a corps that offers you a lump sum of money at the end of your term, use it wisely. Before you spend anything, work out a budget taking into consideration your housing, food, transportation, clothing, and other needs.

Peace Corps Volunteers, for example, take home about \$6,000—broken into two payments. You may travel with that money, and take an around-the-world flight path home. You earned the money and you deserve to have fun with it if you want.

But if you are coming straight back to the United States, haven't got a job lined up, and want to use the money more strategically, consider:

- **The cost of an apartment** in the place where you'd like to live. Triple the monthly rent to estimate how much you'll have to plunk down for deposit, plus first and last months' rent, when you sign the lease. If you don't have a car (to save money, don't buy one unless you need it), remember that rents tend to be higher on bus and subway lines.
- Also consider **monthly utilities**—which will depend partly on your tastes and the time of year—and basic **furniture**. Something resembling a bed, a table, and a chair are helpful to start. Use your closets and suitcase to hold clothes for now; keep an eye out for decent used furniture at thrift stores and garage sales. Friends and family may have furniture collecting dust in the attic that they'd be willing to lend or give you.
- **Haircut and new clothes.** Your hair may benefit from a trip to the barber or salon. Save money by visiting a beauty school that offers student haircuts for a reduced price. The clothes you took with you into Peace Corps may be pretty threadbare by now or you may have abandoned them overseas. As such, they likely are not suitable for job interviewing. If you disagree, ask a trusted friend to give their opinion—sometimes a person can wear an item too long to notice the holes and nubs themselves. Invest in some good interview outfits (think plain, accessorizable, interchangeable, and conservative so you can wear them in a variety of settings). You may feel rich with your readjustment allowance, but it's best not to overspend.
- **Groceries and transportation costs** for the duration of your job search. How much do you spend each month on groceries? Eating out? (You may need to do it once or twice to remember.) If you have a car waiting for you back home, how much will you spend for a tune up and gas? If you don't have a car, how much will you spend on mass transit?
- **Health insurance?** Corps Care—the insurance plan you have access to as a recently Returned Peace Corps Volunteer—is free the first month, but \$140 per month thereafter (for your first 18 months home).
- Finally, think about the things you need to make your job search possible: A **cell phone**? A **computer**? If you need to buy these things, include them in your budget.

## MORE TIPS ON BUDGETS AND FINANCE

**Making a Difference: A Guide to Personal Profit in a Nonprofit World** is a free PDF booklet available at [www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html).

The booklet, developed by the National Endowment for Financial Education and Idealists.org, introduces a range of money-smart topics for people thinking about a nonprofit career—from handling student loan debt to thinking about salaries and benefits, credit and savings basics, and investing.





## Spending your readjustment allowance wisely (continued)

### Expenses for your first month home from Peace Corps

Typical expenses	Your estimates	Example – Portland, OR
Rent		$\$700 \times 3 = \$2,100$
Utilities and furniture		\$300
Clothes and a haircut		\$200
Groceries and transportation		\$500
Health insurance		Free for first month (Corps Care)
Cell phone, computer, phone and internet charges		$\$1,000 + \$100/\text{month} = \$1,100$
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$4,200</b>

Taken together, you've spent thousands of dollars, just for your first month home and a few essentials. After you've taken care of the priorities, save as much as you can—you just don't know how long the job search may last. As you can tell, you don't have a lot of room for shopping sprees, but at least you won't have to go into debt.



Before your term ends, consider taking a part-time job (if it's allowed)."

### Action steps

- Before your term of service ends, consider taking a part-time job if you can (and it's allowed), and save the extra income for the transition. Once your term ends, you can hang on to the job for the length of your job search. If you are in a program that forbids moonlighting, or if your schedule makes it impossible, consider the ideas below.
- Create a budget for yourself (like the one above) so you have a sense of how much money you'll need for essentials. This will help you know how much money you'll need to have saved, or that you'll want to earn now, as well as how much money you have left over to spend on extras like entertainment and fancy coffee drinks.
- Once your term has ended, look for ways to cut costs and bring in some money. For example, some people have the option of living at home or with friends. Establish early in your stay how much rent they'd like you to contribute, and a timeframe for moving on—and tread lightly. It can be hard to gauge the disruption your moving in causes to the lives of your hosts.
- If you were receiving public benefits during your term, or living in low-income housing, you should be able to continue until you've found a job that increases your income significantly. For some low-income housing,



your income can increase without affecting your lease. Check with your housing manager or case worker if you aren't sure. *Note that most service corps positions do not count as "employment" and so you should not count on unemployment benefits to kick in once your term has ended.*

Whether you have the ability to couch surf at home or among friends, you should still consider temporary employment, or "temping." With temporary employment, you'll be able to afford to put food on the table; it may even provide some other benefits. The key is to find a short-term source of income that also lets you take time to pursue job interviews as you are invited to them.

Here are some options for temporary employment:

- Let your network know you are looking for something temporary to tide you over until you find something more permanent. They may have ideas.
- You can find temporary work through a "temp agency"—an employment agency that helps connect people with organizations that have short-term gaps in staffing. Larger nonprofits use temp agencies to hire short-term workers to fill in for people on vacation, maternity leave, sick leave, or those who've left the organization permanently. The pay isn't super, but it's often better than minimum wage. Further, you can use the experience strategically. Let's say you are interested in working on issues of food security. Find out where the relief organizations or larger food banks in your region get their temporary staff. You can do this with a phone call to the main phone number of the nonprofit. Sign up with the same temp agency that the nonprofit uses. When you do, let the temp agency know you are interested in working with that nonprofit—and ask what other nonprofits use the agency. Benefits of this kind of arrangement include networking at your target nonprofit and showcasing your work ethic. Temp agencies sometimes offer health insurance options for temps who have worked through the agency for a set minimum amount of time.
- Search Idealist.org—under "job type" you'll see "Temporary." As you are searching for permanent jobs, also tick the box for temporary jobs.
- Consider skills you've built that may allow you to freelance or seek contracts, such as technical writing, grantwriting, event planning, photography, or even volunteer management for special events. Find out where these jobs are posted, and also check Idealist and Craigslist. Also, consider tutoring students in academic subjects, musical instruments, or athletic skills that you are particularly adept at. This may require a lot of work on the front end as you research how and where to market yourself, but once you get a client or two, word of mouth may be all you need to promote and build your client base.



- If you've garnered some teaching experience during your service term, you may be able to work as a substitute teacher. Some school districts don't require a teaching license for subs, so if you don't have a license, ask what the policies are.
- Some industries—like retail, hospitality, and food service—expect regular staff turnover. Consider accepting a job with a company or coop so you can pay your rent. If your schedule is less regular than 9-to-5, your job search can continue as normal.
- Similarly, seasonal work means that the job will end after a month or so. Some companies, stores, and farms need more workers during certain times of the year. (For example, a retail store might need more help in December; a fireworks stand might need more help in June and July; summer camps need counselors.) If you are ending your term of service during a time with seasonal employment needs, consider taking advantage. Again, seasonal positions are often available for weekends and evenings so you can use daytime hours for the job search.
- Ranches, international travel programs for youth, national park concessionaires, and summer camps all offer summer jobs. The benefit of these types of positions is that you can avoid paying rent and grocery costs a bit longer. The downside is that you may have limited time off, and you may be far from home, so it could be difficult to access job interviews. If you plan to head to school in the fall, though, lining up these types of summer jobs is ideal.



**Beyond putting food on the table and paying the rent, temporary jobs can benefit you as you apply for new jobs.”**

Beyond putting food on the table and paying the rent, temporary jobs can also benefit you as you apply for new jobs. Because you don't need the new job as desperately as you would if you were completely out of work, you will be more confident and relaxed in interviews. You can also be more particular in choosing which positions to apply to, and which job offers to accept.

Further, if you are staying with friends or family, you won't be as much of a financial burden to them if you have income and can contribute to rent, utilities, and food expenses. Plus, they'll see you are making an effort to regain independence, which they may appreciate.

Another advantage of temporary employment is that you will be less likely to go into debt or damage your credit rating during your transition. If you have a credit card, use it carefully, pay it off monthly (or at the very least pay more than the minimum amount required), and pay on time.





## CESAR'S STORY: STAYING AFLOAT

Cesar's term of service as a teacher in a community center for immigrants is winding down. He's applied to several organizations with a variety of missions, which work on different issues, and with a range of roles to play. One organization had an opening for an administrative assistant. Another had a marketing specialist opening. A third was looking for a program assistant. He hasn't heard back from any of them. He's not too discouraged yet, though, because he knows the local job market isn't great and he has faith that he'll be led where his gifts are most needed.

Cesar knows he wants to work in a grassroots organization where he can wear many hats, but isn't concerned as much about what the organization does, as long as it is in service to people in need. He is pretty sure he doesn't want to be a teacher. He has enjoyed his work with immigrants but hasn't seen any job openings related to that kind of work.

As his last month at the host site draws near, he starts to fear that finding a job will be harder than he imagined. He has spent much of his savings from his cell phone job to make car payments this year. His last two paychecks from his service program will only cover one-and-a-half pay periods, so he starts to worry about his next rent payment, health insurance, car payments, food...

He's tempted to try to stay on at his service site another year, though he knows it would be for the wrong reasons. The main issues preventing him from committing to a second year are that he's eager to try something new, and also he's not crazy about committing to another year of full-time teaching.

He looks for a part-time job that he can take on as a corps member and eventually finds a job at the registration desk of the local YMCA. The pay isn't bad, and the hours are mainly evening and weekend, which is enough to tide him over. The schedule leaves him the daytime hours to finish his service term, and once that's over, to look for work. And finally, it's still a nonprofit where he can learn a lot and meet people in positions he aspires to.

The job won't include health insurance, so he also explores the Massachusetts health plan. He's lucky that he lives in a state with universal health coverage but it still takes some effort and time to get himself enrolled.

A month before his term ends, Cesar is offered the part-time YMCA job, and gets to work right away, evenings and weekends. He vows to keep it until he finds something more related to his interests. For now it supplements his service corps income.



## Staying insured

Because health insurance is so often tied to employment, losing it can be another challenge for the newly graduated corps member. It may be tempting to go without insurance—whether they like it or not, millions of people in the United States lack health care coverage. If you can continue your health insurance in some form, you should seriously consider it. The benefits of having medical insurance can range from paying less for prescription medication and doctor's visits, to protecting yourself against accruing serious debt in case of an accident. With health insurance, you may be more likely to see a doctor for regular checkups and in the earlier stages of an illness, thereby catching problems when they are small and possibly more responsive to treatment.

### Action steps

- If you have a health need that requires prescription medicine, you may want to stockpile what you can before you leave your term. Ask the pharmacist or insurance company how soon you can fill your prescription again—it may be every two weeks, for example—and then go back to refill.
- If you are young enough, or still in college part-time, you may be able to seek coverage under your parents' plan.
- Your program may let you pay your own insurance premium through a program called Cobra and thus keep your same or similar insurance after your term ends; look carefully, because you might find cheaper rates on your own if you shop around.
- Another option is to try to get on your state's health plan, if your state offers one, and if you are eligible. Getting enrolled may take a while, so if you have a more immediate health concern, this option may not be ideal. If you are currently living where you'd like to have state health coverage, find out if you can start the enrollment process while you are still in your service program. Your low income probably qualifies you. Other eligibility criteria usually include your age and mental or physical condition. To find out if your state has a public health plan, do an internet search or call your local hospital.
- You may also be able to find health coverage through your college alumni association or professional associations in your field.

## Surpassing these challenges

While you are facing a lot of challenges right now, the greatest of these may be that you are forced to focus so much on yourself. For many service corps participants, advocating for other people comes so much more naturally than planning for their own futures. Keep in mind that to help others you need to attend to yourself and that you have achieved great things during your term, stretched your limits, and risen to so many new and unfamiliar occasions with grace and aplomb. If you can learn new skills to benefit your organization's constituents or the students in your school, surely you can master the job search skills you need for, and overcome the complications inherent in, a career transition of this magnitude.

### MORE ABOUT HEALTH INSURANCE

To read a brief overview of insurance terms and options, check out this Wikipedia article on “health insurance”:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health\\_insurance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_insurance)

If you can't access health insurance, consider researching low-cost health clinics in your area, in case you get sick. To find listings of free or low-cost medical clinics, see <http://freemedicalcamps.com>. Some of these serve only certain populations (HIV patients, for example) so call ahead.



## Section three: Translating your experience

For any job search or school admissions process, you've got to learn how to explain your skills and experiences. This discussion focuses first on describing your service corps to hiring managers—people who may have a lot of background knowledge about your specific corps, or very little. Knowing how to succinctly explain the type of service can benefit you in conversation and writing. This section discusses ways to translate your service experience and transferable skills on paper and in person. It goes on to prepare you to handle the unspoken assumptions hiring managers may make about you, assist corps members at mid-career to explain their reasons for participating in the corps, and help corps members who terminated their service early to overcome some of the associated challenges. Finally, the section discusses ways all corps members can successfully negotiate salary and benefits after a job offer.

As a graduating service corps participant, you have an extra challenge: How do you explain your term of service to your network and prospective employers who might not be familiar with the inner workings of your program? No matter how well known your program is, you should never assume that the people you speak with have any specific prior knowledge of it, or even of the concept of long-term, full-time service.

### Introducing your service corps

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Most nonprofit hiring managers may have heard of Teach For America, Peace Corps, City Year, and some other service corps. They may even have children, family, or friends participating in a program, or they may be alums themselves. They may be confident that they know enough about the program you participated in that they don't need to ask about it. But the truth is, they may not understand the differences between, say, Public Allies and City Year. Or they may not truly understand how and why VSO volunteers serve abroad—or that assignments vary greatly from country to country. Other hiring managers may have no connection to, or background knowledge about, service corps opportunities *at all*. In all of these instances, preparing to translate your term of service is essential. Learn to focus on the transferable skills you built during your term. (See the discussion of frameworks for organizing your skills beginning on page 72.)

When useful, provide a simple explanation of your service corps program, including its mission and method of service. Doing so, you enable your hiring manager to clearly understand the specific strengths of your experience. In addition you'll show that you can speak eloquently about an organization you've been involved with—a trait any employer would relish. If you don't already know how to describe your corps, look at the language used on its website, search for news articles, or ask your program director.





Be prepared to talk about your goals for the future. If you went through the process of discerning your career path—evaluating and reflecting on your experiences, researching opportunities, and talking to people who were doing what you would like to do—you have probably arrived at clear goals for yourself, and a way of describing what you hope to do with the next stage of your life.

You may worry that a hiring manager will be turned off by your affiliation with a service corps. After all, you haven't been a staff member of your host site, but a full-time corps member or stipended volunteer. *Keep in mind that the skills you built during your term are what your prospective employer is really after.* Emphasizing your service affiliation may also serve as a shorthand for letting your employer know that you aren't job-hopping by looking for a new job right now. Finally, your participation in the service program may garner you “network love” if the hiring manager is also an alum, or is a fan of your program.

## Translating for the resume and cover letter (or school admissions essay)

How to craft your resume may raise questions for you. Service programs are often considered a form of volunteering, and even if you earned a stipend, you may have been called a “volunteer” throughout your term. You may wonder, will employers take a service term seriously as professional experience? Should you include the name of your service program in your title?

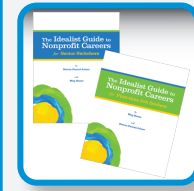
For the resume, it's a good idea to include both your title or role within your host organization as well as your title as a participant in the service corps. For example: “Instructor of College English – Peace Corps Volunteer,” or “Volunteer Coordinator – AmeriCorps Member.”

In the first bullet point, include a brief explanation of your program:

- Designed and launched a volunteer program during a one-year term with a national corps of conservation volunteers.

Likewise, in your cover letter or school admissions essay, include a phrase or brief explanation of your service. For example: “During my time with City Year—a ten-month, urban youth corps that serves children—I developed tutoring, event planning, and cross-cultural communication skills.”

Mentioning your affiliation with your service program, you will help the hiring team understand why your stint in your last “job” was relatively short, you'll help them understand your program, and you may even connect with them as an insider if they are also a service corps alum.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

The elevator pitch and

other aspects of networking are detailed in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)

Chapter Eight of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) can help you effectively market your distinct skills.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html)



This *Companion* doesn't go into detail about all there is to learn about crafting resumes and cover letters, and preparing for your interviews. See Chapters Eight and Nine of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* for these career search details.

## Translating your experience for the interview

When it comes time to interview for a position, regardless of how service-savvy the hiring team appears to be, you'll do yourself a favor by proactively describing your service program and experience. You can bring the topic up when you're talking about something you accomplished during the term.

Chapter Nine of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* explains thoroughly how to prepare for the interview. The discussion here addresses only issues of special concern to a transitioning corps member.

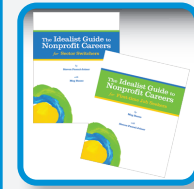
For the interview, adapt your elevator pitch—the brief, oral introduction to your service experience introduced in [Part One](#) of this *Companion*—that you've grown accustomed to using during your term. The short explanation should include:

- Your program's mission or vision
- The length of the term
- The primary method(s) of your service
- Any numerical indicators of success while you were on the job
- Any leadership roles you took on during your term
- Your reasons for serving, and one or two ways your experience has meaningfully changed you
- How the service experience has led to your applying for this job, now.

This could sound like:

"I am just ending a term with Habitat for Humanity's AmeriCorps VISTA program—a year-long opportunity that allowed me to help people buy their own homes. I chose to serve in AmeriCorps because I wanted more than an entry-level job during my first year out of college, and I wanted a team to consult with during that year. After a few months I was selected to join the board of a partner organization. The experience I had training new volunteers—doubling participation in our projects—is the reason I'm so excited to apply for this volunteer manager position."

In *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* you can read about preparing talking points for your interview. Talking points are key ideas you'd like to communicate during the interview, either through the questions you ask, or the information you include in your responses. Clearly explaining your service program can be one category of your



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

For a guide to creating re-

sumes and cover letters (complete with samples), see **Chapter Eight** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html)

**Chapter Nine** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) explains how to prepare for and succeed in an interview.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html)

**Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) can help you develop a concise and compelling "elevator pitch."

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)



talking points. Even if your interviewers do not ask you to talk about your term (after all, they might think they know enough about it), make the effort to introduce the topic and clearly identify several specific skills, experiences, or benefits that you have gained from the program.

With regard to talking about the skills you gained during your term of service, Pam Rechel has created a valuable exercise called “Translating your experience into job speak.” Found on pages 73-74 of this *Companion*, the exercise will prepare you for effectively answering almost any question a hiring manager can think to ask you about your past experience. The key is to share concrete anecdotes about your achievements, rather than listing them superficially:

“As the volunteer manager for my organization, I recruited and trained over 700 new volunteers. When I started the program we had few volunteers show up. We didn’t have a marketing plan, or a database for collecting contact information about our new volunteers. I identified the problems and researched ways to overcome them. Within a few months we started to see more volunteer interest, and had systems in place to put them to work. Those volunteers went on to build housing for ten families, and many are still helping us out.”



### ACE’S STORY: TRANSLATING EXPERIENCES

Thanks to a scholarship that all participants in his service corps receive, Ace is able to put some money aside for college. It’s a good amount, but it’s not enough to get through an associates degree program, which Ace and his mentor have decided on as a first step for his education. So for now, Ace plans to apprentice with Solar NOLA, a nonprofit that partners with the city of New Orleans to make solar panel installation affordable. Ace knows Rod, the technician who heads the installation team, but his first interview at the organization is with Gail, the human resources manager.

Ace isn’t sure what Gail knows about his service program, which is pretty new. Rod may have explained it to her in detail, or not at all. Ace also doesn’t know if Gail has any background knowledge about national service corps, though many corps have been involved with rebuilding the region in the aftermath of the hurricanes in 2005. Finally, he knows he needs to address his criminal record—and he’s prepared to do so.

He decides to briefly introduce his service corps, and then talk about the skills he’s built. In the interview he offers the salient and unique aspects of his corps: They served full-time for 10 months, he was among 50 corps members, they took classes each Friday on a range of topics related to green construction and

### WHAT ARE TRANSFERABLE SKILLS?

The term “transferable skills” is not just jargon. Having developed a skill set in one setting, you can then adapt those skills to a new setting. That’s why, in the nonprofit sector at least, volunteer experience can be as valuable as paid work experience. Ultimately, hiring managers are more interested in the skills you’ve developed, and less so in the setting where you acquired them.

For example, managing volunteers for community service projects helps prepare you to manage event volunteers. Planning and running an awards event during your term of service helps prepare you to coordinate a fundraising event in your next position.

Packing your skills and moving on to a new situation, you will have some new things to learn and challenges to overcome. But have confidence that the skills you gained during your service term are as authentic and valuable as if you’d been paid a salary to develop them. The key to unlocking their value is in how you communicate their transferability to the hiring manager.



### ACE'S STORY (CONTINUED)

renovation, and they served Monday through Thursday at sites throughout the city, doing a variety of different tasks.

Ace's new skills include his ability to identify different types of weather damage, familiarity with the range of techniques to thwart their spread, and experience grappling with work atop the variety of roof pitches and styles in New Orleans. This knowledge has allowed him to assess which strategies are most appropriate and cost-effective for different scenarios. By the end of his term, Ace had realized he wanted to learn more about solar installation after working on projects with Rod.

He acknowledges that he was a nonviolent offender in the past, and explains that he didn't understand what his alternatives were at the time. He now has a much clearer sense of how to make a life for himself and his family, and understands better how education can be a powerful influence in a person's life. He knows what happened to his city in 2005, and he wants to be part of rebuilding it.

As he clearly spells out the scope of his skills, experiences, and involvement with his corps, Gail realizes the depth of Ace's knowledge. She likes that his experience in the corps has affirmed his passion for contributing to the community, and that he knows how he wants to continue his personal and professional development.

## Some frameworks to help you organize your experiences

The next few pages highlight two frameworks that may prove helpful as you prepare to translate your term. The first is an exercise created by Pam Rechel of Brave Heart Consulting, included on the next two pages of this *Companion*. The idea is to identify your top strengths then prepare an anecdote that illustrates a specific time you employed each strength, including the positive outcomes of your efforts. The exercise prepares you to articulately answer questions during a job or school interview, and to share concrete examples of your past accomplishments.

Practice telling each story ahead of time, if it helps you—but be careful about sounding too rehearsed in an interview. To jog your memory during an interview, bring a typed list of your strengths and a word or phrase that reminds you of the anecdote you'd planned to share, along with information that helps you drive home the impact of your actions.

### WORKING WITH A CRIMINAL RECORD

Career transitions with a criminal record bring up special challenges and scenarios. Use your term to work with your service corps program staff and other supporters to practice writing and speaking about your past in a way that is honest and helps you focus on what you have learned from your mistakes. Employers will want to know whether you've accepted responsibility for your actions and changed.

On job application forms that directly ask about your past, always be honest. When the application involves sending in a cover letter and resume, you don't have to use those to explain your history, but it is a good idea to disclose your past before you are offered a job.

Depending on your past offenses, you may find certain lines of employment off-limits. Learn what the limits are so that you don't go through all the hoops of a job application process only to be turned down on technicalities.



# Translating your experience into job speak

by Pam Rechel, Brave Heart Consulting, [www.braveheartconsulting.com](http://www.braveheartconsulting.com)

## General competencies – life and work skills

There are many competencies that apply to ALL jobs. These are the competencies that you've been developing through your whole life. You take those skills with you to any job. Sometimes people get "hired for their technical skills... but fired for their general work skills".

To translate your experience into a language that an employer can understand, it is very important to:

- Name the competency or skill
- Give an example of a time when you used or learned the skill
- Identify ways the skill applies to the job you want and to clearly tell the potential employer how you think your skills match with the job requirements. It's up to you to help them connect the dots for them.

### Exercise

1. On the competency list (next page), select your top 15 skills. Mark the first ones that jump out at you. Go over the list again to see if you've missed any.
2. Go over the list again and **put a star or two by the top 5 skills**—the ones you think are *the strongest or becoming stronger*. Pick skills you are proud of and want to strengthen even if you're not fabulous yet. By focusing on them, you soon will be fabulous!
3. Begin writing the list of "technical skills", those specific skills that apply to your job. It doesn't mean just computer skills. Examples are: teaching children to prepare for earthquakes; using knowledge of how to apply for college to mentor high school kids; teaching reading to children who don't speak English.
4. For each of the top skills, write down an example of a time when you used the skill. Write about what you did, what you learned, and the impact it had on you and the situation.
5. For each of your skills or competencies, develop at least one example of a specific time when you used the skill. For example, "There was a time last fall when I helped two students resolve a conflict. I did this by...".
6. For every job you want, review the list of competencies and imagine which competencies are required for that job. Think of a time when you displayed that competency. Describe the examples in interviews or in your cover letter.

Good luck!

Idealist.org gratefully acknowledges Pam Rechel of Brave Heart Consulting for allowing us to reprint her "Translating your experience into job speak" exercise, which was originally designed for Life After AmeriCorps Training, June 2006. For more of Pam Rechel's work, please visit [www.braveheartconsulting.com](http://www.braveheartconsulting.com)



# Translating your experience into job speak (page 2)

by Pam Rechel, Brave Heart Consulting, [www.braveheartconsulting.com](http://www.braveheartconsulting.com)

## Competencies

### Thinking skills

1. \_\_\_\_ Analyze and solve problems
2. \_\_\_\_ Make sound decisions
3. \_\_\_\_ Make sound recommendations
4. \_\_\_\_ Innovate (create new solutions)

### Administration

5. \_\_\_\_ Write project plans
6. \_\_\_\_ Work efficiently
7. \_\_\_\_ Manage programs
8. \_\_\_\_ Manage projects
9. \_\_\_\_ Manage volunteers
10. \_\_\_\_ Recruit volunteers

### Leadership

11. \_\_\_\_ Lead a team
12. \_\_\_\_ Demonstrate leadership as a mentor
13. \_\_\_\_ Motivate and inspire others
14. \_\_\_\_ Coach others
15. \_\_\_\_ Adapt to change
16. \_\_\_\_ Lead change

### Interpersonal skills

17. \_\_\_\_ Build relationships
18. \_\_\_\_ Manage disagreements and conflict

19. \_\_\_\_ Be a strong team member
20. \_\_\_\_ Create partnerships
21. \_\_\_\_ Engage diverse groups to participate
22. \_\_\_\_ Lead meetings effectively

### Communication

23. \_\_\_\_ Speak effectively
24. \_\_\_\_ Listen openly
25. \_\_\_\_ Prepare written communication
26. \_\_\_\_ Make presentations

### Motivation

27. \_\_\_\_ Demonstrate drive and commitment

### Personal management

28. \_\_\_\_ Act with integrity (take responsibility for personal actions)
29. \_\_\_\_ Demonstrate flexibility
30. \_\_\_\_ Develop yourself (learn new things)
31. \_\_\_\_ Strong sense of self-worth and capabilities
32. \_\_\_\_ Commit to quality (strive to meet a new standard of excellence)
33. \_\_\_\_ Anticipate, recognize, and meet customer needs
34. \_\_\_\_ Overcome difficult challenges
35. \_\_\_\_ Manage crises
36. \_\_\_\_ Maintain a positive attitude in the midst of chaos

### Technical competencies that apply to your specific work.

For example: teach children about safety, disaster relief, etc.

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

**ASSIGNMENT:** Select your top 15 competencies—your best skills. Then put stars (\*\*) by the top 5.





In addition to Pam Rechel’s exercise, consider using the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA) framework that federal government job applications often include. A KSA statement is an opportunity for you to write about your knowledge, skills, and abilities related to a specific job function. Whether or not you’re applying for a federal job, using the KSA framework to inventory your qualifications can help you share them with a hiring manager or school. First, find a job announcement that appeals to you—or use one you’ve saved from the Career Tracks Exercise described in [Part One](#). (For school applications, consider the qualities the school says it’s looking for in a candidate.) Identify each skill, requirement, or other required credential mentioned in the announcement. Then, brainstorm the knowledge, skills, and abilities you have related to each qualification you’ve highlighted. In brainstorming your KSA list, include any and all experiences—don’t limit yourself to paid experiences. Research you did in school, summer jobs and internships, volunteer and service corps experiences, hobbies, student clubs, family responsibilities, etc.

### Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA) framework

Qualification	Knowledge	Skill	Ability

See a guide to writing an effective KSA statement from the Partnership for Public Service: [www.ourpublicservice.org/OPS/programs/calltoserve/toolkit/KSAs.pdf](http://www.ourpublicservice.org/OPS/programs/calltoserve/toolkit/KSAs.pdf).

## What an employer may assume about you as a service corps alum

While you can never be sure what a potential employer’s views of your service program might be, you may encounter some or all of these preconceptions. Some are positive, others are negative. Some of them may in fact be true for you, and others completely false:

- That you were **unsure what you wanted to do** with your life, or you **couldn’t find a “real job”** so you chose a service program to “buy time.” You must be able to explain what drew you to national or international service.
- That you may be **rootless**, and that you **long to get back on the road** as soon as possible—particularly if you’re just getting home from an international service experience. If you are looking for a job in the United States after serving abroad, be clear in the interview why you are ready to be at home, and how you hope to implement new skill sets here.
- That you have developed **skills that may or may not transfer**. For example, some people may think you’ve spent your entire term doing manual labor and

### FROM THE FRONT LINES TO A MANAGEMENT POSITION

Idealist.org offers resources that can help you translate your direct service into a career in program or organizational management. Focusing on your transferable skills can move the conversation from your job duties as an educator, construction worker, counselor, etc. to the skills you have that will contribute to your success in a management role. For starters, the article “Sharing your story with the admissions team” ([www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/sharingyourstory.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/sharingyourstory.html)) helps prepare you to talk about the transferable skills you developed as a corps member with graduate admissions or with a hiring manager. *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* also offer support for taking stock of your transferable skills—see **Chapter Three** ([www.idealists.org/careerguide](http://www.idealists.org/careerguide)).

If required or recommended, more education may be in order. Check out grad schools that offer management degrees—many business schools focus on nonprofit management and corporate social responsibility; specific nonprofit management degree programs exist across the country; and public administration degrees are also very well received in the nonprofit world. Learn more about your grad school options at [www.idealists.org/gradschool](http://www.idealists.org/gradschool), or stop by an Idealist **Graduate Degree Fair for the Public Good** in your area ([www.idealists.org/gradfairs](http://www.idealists.org/gradfairs)). Many alternatives to grad school also exist and could be beneficial in your transition, including certification and other types of professional development (see [www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/alternatives.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/alternatives.html)).



fail to see that you had to manage projects, liaise with local partners, and promote your project to local media—in addition to being handy with a hammer and nails. Explain which relevant skills you already have for each position you apply for—in your resume, cover letter, and interview.

- That you are **not on-trend** with your field, or that your **career goals aren't focused**. Especially if your service assignment was not related to the position you are currently applying for, you may find that employers miss the larger value that your service experience has brought you. Be vigilant about translating your experience, and communicating your familiarity with the field as well.
- That you are a **hard worker** and are more **driven by mission than by money**. Your hiring manager may have a very idealized, even unrealistic, image of people who have participated in national or international service. To the extent that the assumption is true, do everything you can to support it with your actions. Passion and enthusiasm go a long way in the hiring process—especially at nonprofit organizations. A downside of this view is that they may expect that you're accustomed to working long hours.
- That you are an **ineffectual dreamer**. Your hiring manager may assume you're a romantic who doesn't know how to actually get anything done. Show that passion and pragmatism aren't mutually exclusive by sharing creative and practical methods you employed to succeed during your term.
- That you are **resourceful** and can **do exceptional things with a small budget**. Most people recognize that service corps members haven't been working with huge budgets. If you have built programs from scratch, or improvised with few resources, be sure to share these stories and skills during the interview.
- That you are **naive, happy, and friendly**. For people who have never participated in a term of service, it may be hard to imagine what you have gone through in the term. You've likely seen and experienced issues—poverty, discrimination, pollution, addiction, natural disasters, etc.—that have forced you to confront your most basic assumptions in life, and to grow tougher and stronger. You may not have turned into a cynic, but you likely have a firmer grasp on reality. It's important to show your hiring manager your astute, grounded self.
- That you are **liberal politically**, or that you **share the same political views as your country of service** (if not the United States). While you should avoid talking about politics during your interview—you do not know and cannot assume the politics of the person hiring you—recognize that you may be seen as a liberal. Although national service enjoys bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress, legislation for Peace Corps, VISTA, and AmeriCorps all were initiated during Democratic presidential administrations. Your best bet in response to these assumptions—regardless of your personal political views—is to remain staunchly neutral and professional.
- That you are **religious**, or share a similar practice. The interview may or may not be the best time to discuss your faith, depending on the work you're hoping to do. If information about your faith isn't important for the job interview,

## DISABILITY AND DISCLOSURES

While some federal laws govern disability accommodations, regulations really vary state by state. If you need accommodations in your workplace, you should make sure you know your state's regulations about what employers are required to provide. Also, be sure to read up on if, when, and how to disclose your disability. For more information on disabilities and accommodations in the workplace, here are some resources that may be useful:

### Definition of a disability

[www.jobaccess.org/ada\\_definition.htm](http://www.jobaccess.org/ada_definition.htm)

### Americans with Disabilities Act

[www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/)

### Handbook of your employment-related rights under the ADA

[www.eeoc.gov/facts/jobapplicant.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/jobapplicant.html)

### Job Accommodation Network

offers articles and resources on a variety of ADA-related topics, searchable by federal, state, local regulations; by disability; by specific legislation; and other criteria. Resources include "Pre-Employment Testing and the ADA", "Health Benefits Plans and the ADA", and many others.

[www.jan.wvu.edu/links/](http://www.jan.wvu.edu/links/)

For additional resources on disability accommodations, visit the resource page for Chapter Ten of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*:

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/ch10resources.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/ch10resources.html)



it's probably best to not mention it, whether or not you share the faith of the program you took part in. Note that you are free to disclose personal information during the interview, but it's difficult to gauge the response—positive or negative—such a disclosure will elicit; also, because of anti-discrimination legislation, it is illegal for the interviewers to initiate the discussion of this topic. Thus, disclosing personal information prior to the job offer can put your hiring manager in an awkward position.

- That you **will accept a lower starting salary** than someone coming from a staff position at another organization. You must do your research to learn what the average salaries are for people in the position you're vying for. If you're offered the job, be prepared to negotiate. Keep reading for insights about negotiating your salary during this transition.

The purpose for listing these is not to frighten you but to make it clear that it's your job to respond to any misconceptions the hiring team may have about what you've been up to during your term of service. Without knowing their assumptions, your best bet is to be proactive in explaining—in writing and in the interview—what your service experience was all about, and how you can transfer the skills you built to help their organization achieve its mission.

## Justifying your service participation at mid-career and beyond

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If you are at a mid-career point as you end your term of service, you have an extra task. Service corps are definitely pegged as something young people do, so you've got to effectively explain how and why you chose to take a break from a career to do a term of service. Hiring managers will likely assume that you didn't do it for the money.

Help hiring managers understand what led you to your term—whether it was a way to make a transition to public service, because you were drawn by the position description and wanted the support of a cohort during the transition, or because it was an opportunity to work on an issue area you care deeply about. For example:

“I had been volunteering at the organization for several years, so when the funding came through for the AmeriCorps VISTA position, my supervisor encouraged me to apply for it. And I'm glad I did, because I've gained volunteer recruitment and management skills, and I know now that I can develop a program from scratch.”

A truthful explanation will help hiring managers overcome any suspicion they might have about you—especially if you explain how your service has led to applying for the current position.



**Service corps are pegged as something young people do, so mid-career participants must explain how and why they chose to take a break from a career.”**



Avoid telling negative stories during the interview about what you left behind in your old career by joining the corps. For example, don't kvetch about the corporate grind, or working in a bureaucracy. Instead, talk about what drew you to service in a nonprofit, school, or government agency—for example, a social issue you hoped to tackle, a population you wanted to help, or a new way you wanted to apply the skills you honed in a previous career.



### DEENA'S STORY: JUSTIFYING SERVICE

Deena has joined her service corps working on microenterprise development in Ecuador at mid-career, after having run a successful bakery at home in the United States. She has joined the corps because of her interest in micro-lending and because she wants to put her business skills to work helping bring families out of poverty. She wants some field experience before going to graduate school or deciding to leave the baking industry for good.

Deena thinks that her logic will be easy to explain in any job interview, but she wants to make sure she could really tell the story of the passion that inspired her move to Ecuador and that propels her forward in her career.

She writes down all the moments she can think of that have led to her decision:

1. While a nursing student, she made a trip to a developing country to volunteer in a refugee camp which first exposed her to extreme poverty and what she considered “wretched inequality.”
2. More recently, as a Girl Scout Troop leader, she and the troop had a chance to do a service project with Heifer Project International, where they learned that increasing the income of a woman increases the chances for success of her entire family.
3. Finally, as her bakery began to thrive over the years, the initial, exciting challenges of building a business began to wane. She began to question her life's purpose and accomplishments.

All of these impulses ultimately have driven her to research job opportunities and fellowships in micro-lending.

In order to prepare for post-service corps job interviews she chooses to emphasize the story of working with the Girl Scouts. She writes the story out, including the moment one of the girls, Megan, made a comment along the lines of “I never wanted to be a businessperson, but now that I see how business education can help poor families, it makes me want to open a bakery, too, so I can learn the skills to go out and make people's lives better.”

Megan's comment had a profound effect on Deena. It really opened the door to her imagination, to think of her bakery as a means to something much more



### DEENA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

meaningful than pastries, bread, and coffee. It inspired in her an impatience to dive in and find a way to test the waters of a career in micro-lending, which led her to discover her service corps.

Once Deena is able to write down the story of her mid-career progression from business owner to international volunteer, she is clear that she can share the story effectively with any hiring manager who asks.



Be proud of what you accomplished during your shortened term. Six months of service is six months of service!”

## Translating your early termination during an interview

If you terminated your service commitment early, you may have special concerns about how to talk about your experiences. Keep in mind that your hiring manager may not know how long your service term was intended to be, since terms can range from a few weeks to a few years. As a result, you shouldn't feel overly self-conscious about how or when your term ended. This does not mean you should keep your premature departure a secret from the hiring manager—just that you shouldn't expect a barrage of questions about it.

Among other reasons, if you aren't fully upfront that you terminated your service early, and you do get the job, the truth will probably come out—through conversation with you, or during a reference check with your former supervisor. This will cause mistrust and make people wonder what else you've lied about, and possibly cost you a job.

Here are some ideas on how to discuss your early departure during the application process:

- First and foremost, be proud of what you accomplished during your shortened term of service. Six months of service is six months of service!
- On your resume, accurately represent the start and end dates of your service term, in addition to your job duties and accomplishments relevant to the job you're applying for.
- For the interview, be prepared with a logical, sympathetic explanation of why you left early.
- If you left due to personal reasons, be honest but don't go into detail—"I had to take care of a sick family member," or "My family (or financial) obligations made finishing the term impossible."
- If you left for your own health reasons, laws protect you from having to disclose that. "Personal obligations prevented me from completing the term."
- If the reason you exited early was because you clashed with program or host



agency staff, it will not help your chances for employment to bad-mouth them. It's best to move on. Stick to something honest but tastefully ambiguous like, "I wasn't getting the support I needed to do my best work." You may have to come up with a few examples of support you'd like in the new job—so have those ready, too.

- If you are asked to elaborate further about the reasons you left early, state that you'd much rather share what you learned from your service experience itself, rather than how it ended. Be prepared to talk about what you gained from your shortened term.

Depending on the intensely personal circumstances surrounding your departure, you may feel a sense of regret or you may be perfectly content with your decision. You may still resent people—service corps program staff, or host organization supervisors—who were involved with your service. Whatever your lingering feelings are, the interview is not the place to come to terms with them. Focus on the positive.

### **If you've left your site early, how do you salvage a good reference?**

People who left their service commitment early may be nervous about approaching service corps program staff, team leaders, host agency staff, or community partners to request a reference. Your feelings will naturally depend on the circumstances surrounding your departure.

If you left on fairly good terms, because of something beyond your control—medical issues, family illness, natural disaster—your potential references will probably be sympathetic and willing to offer you a positive reference. See below for ideas on how to ask for one.

If you left on poor terms, you may be right to avoid approaching some or all of the people you worked with during your term. Perhaps you had an unresolved conflict with your direct supervisor, or your supervisor asked you to leave for poor performance. In these cases, you may have still developed a strong relationship with someone else—a team leader or service corps program staff person, or a community partner, for example—who would be able to speak honestly about your good qualities.

Schedule a chat with the people you have in mind, and offer them a copy of your resume, cover letter, and job description. Directly address the issue of your early termination, and offer a quick, benign explanation if the person wasn't privy to that information previously. "I left Peace Corps nine months early because I didn't feel I was doing my best work," or "I ended my term with AmeriCorps before I could complete my 1,700 hours of service because of a medical-related family matter."





### Salvaging a reference if you left early... (continued)

Explain your current career objective. Then ask, “Can you give me a good reference?” Hopefully they will be honest with you at this point. If you think they can’t give you a good reference, ask someone else. Employers and school admissions staff are so accustomed to positive recommendations that a sour letter of reference may kill your chances. A reference letter can have some honest discussion of a weakness—you just want to avoid submitting a negative letter.

See page 143 in Chapter Eight of the *Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for Sector Switchers* ([www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html)) for tips about dealing with “burned bridges” in your job application process. That discussion offers advice on how to talk about past professional experiences that ended poorly.

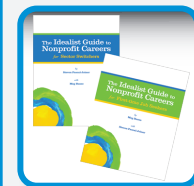
## Translating your experience as part of the salary negotiation

Negotiating your salary may bring up so much anxiety that you feel like skipping it for now. But that would be a mistake. This discussion touches on the challenges you may face negotiating your starting salary in a new—and possibly first—professional position. It also offers encouragement to go ahead and ask for what you are worth. Before reading this section, you will benefit from reading Chapter Ten of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

In your position as a recent service participant, you may feel especially defenseless in negotiating a salary. People often point to their previous salary as way to ask a new employer for a salary they deserve. Because your “previous salary” was a basic living stipend, you may feel at a disadvantage in salary talks.

The remedy is to find out what your skills are worth. While you may not be able to use your immediate previous salary as leverage in negotiations, you can still find out what the market rate is for your many skill sets. (And you can point to past accomplishments that prove you will be an asset to the team you are about to join—have this list handy so that you don’t have to memorize the points to make.)

It’s important to negotiate a salary that will work for you in the long run—not just one that seems impressive now because it’s \$10,000 or \$15,000 more than what you’ve been earning as a corps member. You will know the offer is fair by making sure that the salary is competitive with those for similar positions in your region.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Ten of *The Ideal-*

*ist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) discusses negotiating your compensation package and explores benefits. If you have little or no paid work experience, it’s recommended to read the First-time Job Seekers version.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch10.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch10.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch10.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch10.html)



Be realistic about nonprofit and government salaries in your area. If you entered your service corps at mid-career or beyond, and you are used to working in the business world, you may need to recalibrate salary ranges if you're now aiming to work in the nonprofit sector.

Chapter Ten of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* includes suggested language you can use when asking for more money. It also reminds you that while salary is important, you should also consider the entirety of the compensation package, including the benefits, vacation time, options for flexible schedules, and so on.

### **It's what you deserve, never what you need**

Employers don't care about your car payment or how much you have to pay in rent. It doesn't matter how little your stipend was or how high your student loans are—salaries aren't determined by what you need. Instead, be prepared to speak to why you deserve and are worth a better offer based on your specific skills, qualifications, commitment to the issue, or experience. These factors are what will allow an employer to recognize the value you'll bring to their organization or company, and why you're worth a higher salary.

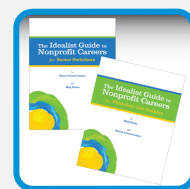
A good resource for figuring out your financial health if you're earlier in your career is the free PDF booklet by the National Endowment for Financial Education and Idealist.org called *Making a Difference: A Guide to Personal Profit in a Nonprofit World* ([www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html)).

Your starting salary is the basis for future raises, so it's worth it to view your long-term financial health when you are negotiating it. Your current expenses may be low because you've had to live simply. But now it may be time to consider financial goals like investing in a house and starting a family—even retirement, no matter your age.

### **BEFORE YOU ACCEPT OR DECLINE AN OFFER...**

Before you accept or decline an offer, here are a few things to take into account:

- Don't get caught up in the moment
- Be sure to consider organizational fit
- Recognize that salary is only one component of the compensation package
- Make sure you understand all of the details of the job offer... including benefits
- Don't forget to negotiate—carefully



### **TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES**

For advice on research-

ing salaries, see **Chapter Three** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html)

Read **Chapter Ten** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) for tips on negotiating your compensation package.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch10.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch10.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch10.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch10.html)



## Section four: Other options for your next steps

*The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* and this *Companion* have both primarily focused on helping you move from your term of service into a nonprofit staff position. As you know, other options may be on the table; a few of these are spelled out below, including committing to a second term of service, considering careers in government or business, furthering your education, and starting your own nonprofit or social enterprise.

### Committing to a second term of service

Doing a second (or third) term of service is a great idea for some people. Before committing, examine your reasons—what are you hoping to achieve in another term?

#### Reasons to consider a second term

You shouldn't commit to second term of service lightly (for example, to avoid undertaking a job search). That said, many corps members who serve a second term do offer solid justifications for their decision. Here are some:

- **Ditto.** You sign on for a second term for all the intentional reasons you signed on for the first one.
- **Continued learning and leadership.** Your second term may give you a chance to deepen your knowledge and serve as a leader among your fellow corps members.
- **Ties to your community.** You've built meaningful relationships in your community this year and you want to continue investing in them.
- **Responsibility for your project.** You want to build on, or finish, what you've started. If you started a new program during your first year, you may want to spend more time establishing it, especially if your organization has no funding to pay a salaried staff person to take over your work.
- **Acting on your new knowledge.** Doing a second term gives you a chance to apply all the lessons you learned during your first term.
- **Curiosity.** Trying a new service corps, or serving in a new place, can teach you about new places, people, roles, systems, organizations, and issues.
- **Good, clean fun.** You may have had so much fun in your first term that you want to do it all again.
- **First-hand experience.** You participated in one service corps, learned a lot about the way things really work and about yourself, and now you want to want to try another service corps.



Many corps members who serve a second term have solid justifications for their decision.”

#### ON SERVING AGAIN

I decided to serve a second term in City Year because I was excited about the opportunity to help launch a new site in a new city. It took a lot of soul-searching because I didn't want to have a repeat of the year I'd just had. In the end, though, I decided serving in a different location, with different people and in a leadership role, would be a great experience. And it was—serving in a new city made the experience unique, and I didn't regret my decision to do a second term at all.

—Hannah Kane, former two-term City Year corps member and Senior Project Manager, Website and Multimedia Production, Idealist.org



Most programs allow you to serve a second (and even a third, or seventh) term of service. Your options may include:

- Signing on with your same service corps, to serve again at your same organization, school, or agency.
- Signing on with your same corps, to serve as a team leader.
- Signing on with your same service corps but serving at a new organization, or even in a new city or country.
- Joining a completely different service corps (while serving in the same or a new city or country).

To discover new corps to explore, take a look at the Corps and Coalition sidebar on The New Service blog ([www.idealistservice.org](http://www.idealistservice.org)). Coming soon you'll find a directory of service corps on Idealist.org ([www.idealistservice.org](http://www.idealistservice.org)).

If you are considering committing to another term with your own corps, find out the specific rules of eligibility from your program director.

Also be aware that if further education is on the horizon for you—if you plan to serve with a program like AmeriCorps VISTA, where you can't be enrolled in school during your term of service—make sure start dates for your target academic programs do not overlap with your service term. Other service corps may not have an explicit prohibition against being in school during the service term, but your schedule and your location during your service term may prevent you from enrolling. Look ahead to these potential conflicts before signing on a second time.

Note that you can only earn two Education Awards from AmeriCorps (no matter the amount of either award), so that if you have already participated in a summer program and earned one Education Award of \$1,000, and then served in a year-long program where you earned a second full Education Award, you are not eligible for further Awards.

## Finding a position in the government sector

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Some things you may not have known about working for the government: Almost every job that exists in the private sector (nonprofit or for-profit) also exists in the public sector. And three times more people work for local and state governments than for the federal government. Also, more federal jobs exist outside of Washington, DC than within it.

People interested in social impact careers are often motivated more by mission and



**Almost every job that exists in the private sector exists in the public sector.”**



issue than by sector, and at the same time, public-private partnerships continue to blur the lines that traditionally distinguished sectors. Because of this you may want to explore job openings in the government sector in addition to the nonprofit sector.

During the first year after finishing their service term, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and former AmeriCorps VISTA have “noncompetitive eligibility” for one year when applying for jobs in the federal government. Noncompetitive eligibility status means you can apply for federal jobs posted with a special status (“noncompetitive appointment eligibility”) in addition to federal jobs that are open to the public. If you were hired, you’d also be able to use your year or two of volunteer service toward calculating your benefits like retirement and vacation time.

## Differences between public and nonprofit sectors

The nonprofit sector taken as a whole lacks an overarching, unifying hierarchy—there is no map of leadership that incorporates the entire sector from the top down. In terms of organizational variety and issue areas, the nonprofit sector is nearly infinite.

Governments, however, are often chartable and full of hierarchies. An elected leader appoints the head of a department; the department oversees that agency; and so on. You can see all the offices of a government in a list. Although sometimes sprawling, a government often operates like a single organism.

Nonprofits are independent and can rise up to fill in the gaps left by corporations and governments. Nonprofits also don’t have to make programmatic or financial decisions based on majority rule, although many nonprofits must comply with regulations that stipulate that their work serves some public benefit.

Governments, however, provide services according to the rules established by city councils and legislatures, and spend money in ways determined by politicians and taxpayers. On a related financial note, nonprofits don’t necessarily have pay grades; governments commonly do.

To begin exploring a public sector career, look at the structure of the government system you’re interested in joining. For example, if you aim to work in your city’s government, find a listing of its structure and agencies online. What bureaus, councils, offices, and boards does it have? What do all of these terms mean for your locale?

Pay attention to the titles people have—what’s comparable to the role you have been playing or have the skills to tackle? Consider the issue areas the agencies focus on—what issues overlap with your professional mission?

Brainstorm people you know who work for local government—or anyone they

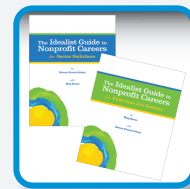
## GETTING STARTED LOOKING FOR A FEDERAL JOB

The **Partnership for Public Service** is an organization that inspires new generations to work in the federal government. They publish guides to entry- and senior-level government careers; sponsor events and regional speakers bureaus; and connect college campuses to federal agencies. Learn more about federal government careers at their website.

[www.ourpublicservice.org](http://www.ourpublicservice.org)

Also the official job-posting website of the federal government is **USAJOBS.gov**:

[www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov)



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

For a deeper discussion

of the differences between the nonprofit, for-profit, and government sectors, see **Chapter One** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch1.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch1.html)

### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch1.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch1.html)



might know who does. Start building your professional network through informational interviewing.

As you chat with people who work in government, notice the language they use. What terms seem new to you, what acronyms are bandied about, and where do they suggest you look for more information? Websites such as [www.acronymfinder.com](http://www.acronymfinder.com) can help you decode acronyms that you come across.

## Finding a position in the business sector

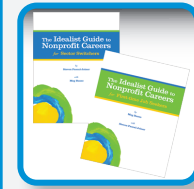
Much of the advice in this *Companion* as well as in *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* is applicable to finding a job in the business sector, too. For instance, building relationships, understanding what role you'd like to play and what type of enterprise you'd like to work for, learning the lingo of the sector, and building the skills and credentials to be taken seriously by a hiring manager are all relevant.

Differences also exist. While many businesses articulate their mission statements, their missions may or may not be centered on creating change on social or environmental issues.

Traditionally, the bottom line of a business is to make a profit, which is another difference from the nonprofit and government sectors. Increasingly businesses talk about other bottom lines, like their company's environmental impact and social responsibility. If you were drawn to service because of the positive impact you could have in your community, businesses that emphasize more than profit may be up your alley. For example, social enterprises—businesses where the core activities aim to enhance the public good—use profits to fuel the growth of public services or spread problem-solving technologies, in addition to accumulating personal wealth.

Responding to demand among customers and employees, more corporations are developing community involvement programs. As a former corps member, you may stand out particularly well in competition for some corporate jobs such as connecting staff with volunteer opportunities, working in the corporation's foundation, or developing a company's efforts to green its business practices.

Other business sector opportunities might appeal to you simply because of the impressive salary and comprehensive benefits—things you have been missing as a corps member. If you take a corporate position that allows it, find ways to incorporate sustainability or a triple bottom line approach into your daily work. With the limited number of business positions that are specifically geared toward sustainability, corporate social responsibility (CSR), community relations, or other socially beneficial



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

You can learn more about

how nonprofit hiring practices differ from those of the for-profit and government sectors by reading **Chapter Twelve** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch12.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch12.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch12.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch12.html)

**Chapter Thirteen** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) deals with some of the common misconceptions about nonprofit work—including some that you (or your potential employer) may hold.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch13.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch13.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch13.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch13.html)





outlets, finding a way to incorporate these values into your daily work will highlight you as innovative, committed to a cause, and self-starting.

If you land a corporate job that does not offer you an outlet for contributing to your community, other ways to stay civically engaged outside the office include volunteering for a nonprofit, serving on the committee of a nonprofit board, or serving on the board itself. Many companies encourage their employees to sit on local nonprofit boards, because it's a positive form of community involvement as well as a good business strategy. Before agreeing to join a board, research the financial, legal, and time commitments of board service.

## Further education

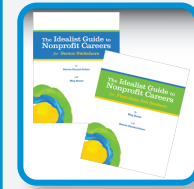
As your term ends you might be enthusiastic about the doors that would open if you had higher credentials—your GED, certification, an undergraduate or graduate degree. Chapter Five of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* offers an overview of various educational options. Idealist.org's Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center ([www.idealism.org/gradschool](http://www.idealism.org/gradschool)) also offers support for people considering graduate school.

In case you are tempted to explore grad school as a way to avoid the job search, check out these articles on both bad ([www.idealism.org/en/psgerc/badreasons.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/psgerc/badreasons.html)) and good ([www.idealism.org/en/psgerc/goodreasons.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/psgerc/goodreasons.html)) reasons for going to grad school.

## Starting your own nonprofit or social enterprise

Based on your service corps and other experiences, you might be inspired to tackle social problems in a way that requires starting a whole new organization or business. For resources (and warnings) around starting a new nonprofit, take a look at Chapter Fourteen of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*.

Learn more about starting your own social enterprise—a nonprofit or a business with equal emphasis on both transformative societal change and financial sustainability—through resources like the Skoll Foundation ([www.skollfoundation.org](http://www.skollfoundation.org)), Echoing Green ([www.echoinggreen.org](http://www.echoinggreen.org)), and the Ashoka Changemakers community ([www.changemakers.com](http://www.changemakers.com)).



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Five of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) contains discussions of both board service and further education (among other topics) as ways to strengthen your candidacy for your chosen career.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch5.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch5.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch5.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch5.html)

If you're considering founding your own nonprofit organization, **Chapter Fourteen** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) is a must-read. It contains advice while also explaining the major first steps in the process.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch14.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch14.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch14.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch14.html)

### MORE WAYS TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD

For many more ideas on how to make a positive impact in your community, check out **The Idealist.org Handbook to Building a Better World**, from Idealist.org and Stephanie Land, published by Penguin Books.

[www.idealism.org/handbook](http://www.idealism.org/handbook)



## Playing catch-up: Networking, building skills, and documenting your service post-service

What if you have found this book after your term of service? What if you are already making the transition, but you weren't very conscientious about building your network or skills during your term, and you didn't document your service accomplishments?

**Shore up your network:** Even if you didn't go out of your way to meet community members during your term of service, you likely came into contact with community leaders regularly, through collaborating with other groups to make your project a success, meeting with visitors at your office, or participating in community events. Take stock of these people and set up informational interviews with them (see Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*), reminding them of who you are and how you met.

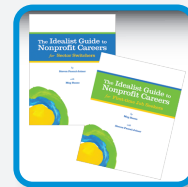
**Inventory your skills:** Unless you entered your term of service with all the experience you needed for it, you probably learned how to do things you had never done before. Brainstorm your skills and prepare to talk about them. See these resources:

- *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*
  - \* Chapter Eight, "Resume Worksheet" activity (p. 142 of First-time Job Seekers version and p. 146 of Sector Switchers version)
  - \* Chapter Three, "Clarifying Your Greatest Skills" activity (pp. 43-44 of First-time Job Seekers version and pp. 47-48 of Sector Switchers version)
- "Sharing your story" article in the Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center ([www.idealistservice.com/en/psgerc/sharingyourstory.html](http://www.idealistservice.com/en/psgerc/sharingyourstory.html))
- "Translating your experience into job speak" activity by Pam Rechel (see pages 73-74 of this Part of this *Companion*)

**Document service that's already completed:** Your biggest challenge may be accessing the computer you used during your service term, if you didn't otherwise save copies of writing samples, photographs, emails, grant proposals or reports, statistics, and other artifacts that could be useful documentation of your term. If possible, ask your service site if you can stop by to pull some documents off the hard drive, or if you have moved far away, if someone can email you specific files.

If part of your service was to make a project sustainable, you may have created a binder or guidebook for the staff, or the next corps member after you. Ask if you can borrow that resource and photocopy it. (In itself, that would serve as a great work sample.)

Finally, connect with fellow corps members or community partners who may have documented projects that you worked on jointly. Websites like Flickr make it easy to share photographs that work well in a professional portfolio.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Four of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) covers many aspects of professional networking—including informational interviewing.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)

The "Resume Worksheet" activity referred to in the "Playing catch-up" text box is in **Chapter Eight** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html](http://www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch8.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html](http://www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch8.html)

The "Clarifying Your Greatest Skills" activity is in **Chapter Three** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html](http://www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html](http://www.idealistservice.com/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html)



# Conclusion

Your career transition poses great challenges—but you’ve overcome challenges before. Can you muster the same passion to advocate for yourself the way you’ve advocated for the people or causes you’ve been serving? Have you created a network that would go to bat for you, if you asked? Have you learned the lessons of living with little money? Can you sell your service corps experience well? The answer is yes!

Your career transition presents many uncertainties, but what’s perfectly clear is that you have risen to meet all the same struggles during your term, and you’ve succeeded. As you move on to your next steps, you take with you the experiences accumulated during your service term. The skills and relationships you’ve built will stay with you and continue to support your work.



## SUMMARY

As your term of service comes to an end and you begin to transition to your next steps, bear in mind that the experience you've gained during your term will be invaluable and enduring.

If the thought of shifting to a new stage of your life is daunting, **draw motivation and courage** (pages 51-52) from the fact that you've already been successful at dealing with a range of experiences during your term. Activate the network you've assembled and dive in—you can do this.

Given the unique experience you've had in your service corps, you may also face some **unique challenges in your transition** (pages 53-67). These can range from insecurity about the best way to market yourself to hiring managers or the right jobs to pursue, to complicated decisions about whether to complete your term or leave early to take up an offer, to worries about staying afloat financially or maintaining access to health care. But don't fret: there's tailored advice to help you navigate any of these concerns right here in these pages.

A major aspect of the transition from service corps to career (or other options) is **translating your experience** (pages 68-82). It's crucial to spend time refining how you go about conveying the value of your term of service—what you've learned and accomplished, how you've made an impact and developed skills. Since you can't assume that other people will immediately grasp the complexity or nuances of your service corps experience by name alone, be prepared to emphasize the transferable skills you've obtained when you interact with potential employers, university admissions staff, and other people who can connect you with your next steps.

While much of this book emphasizes transitions to nonprofit work, we recognize that there are **other options** (pages 83-87) you may choose to pursue, whether that's enrolling in another term of service, exploring work in the government or for-profit sectors, looking to further your education, or perhaps starting your own organization to tackle a cause that matters to you.

## You are here

- This is **Part Two**. The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealists.org/servicecompanion](http://www.idealists.org/servicecompanion).

### About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

**Action Without Borders** is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. [Idealist.org](http://Idealist.org), a project of Action Without Borders, is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, find opportunities and supporters, and turn their good intentions into action.

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career – A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* by Amy Potthast is a product of Action Without Borders' Careers and Service Team based in Portland, OR. This team works to support individuals and organizations with graduate education options; HR and volunteer management resources; and job, internship, and domestic and global volunteer opportunities. Published in 2009 by Action Without Borders.



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# PART THREE



## After your transition

Adjusting to your new work and staying ready for the future

### Part Three Overview

Part Three is beneficial both for former service corps members who are settling into a new job or those who've been working a while and want to reinvigorate their career. It discusses the following topics:

- **Section one: The shock of the new (starting a new job)** (pages 92-102)
  - \* Includes discussions of being a "rookie" at your new job (pages 92-93), getting accustomed to your new coworkers and workplace (pages 93-94), adjusting to the idea of an open-ended time commitment (page 94), taking ownership of the work you do (pages 96-97), adjusting to increased income levels (pages 97-99), and evaluating your feelings after three months on the job (pages 99-100)
- **Section two: Career growth beyond your service term** (pages 102-112)
  - \* Includes discussions continuing to self-assess and evaluate your career (pages 102-103), networking after your service program (pages 104-106), keeping your knowledge and skills current (pages 107-109), and ways to continue building your skills (pages 110-111)

Congratulations on completing your term of service! Your reading these words likely means that you've arrived in a new place in your life and career. As you move beyond your term, it's important to continue the good habits you started as a corps member in order to continue advancing your career—namely, building relationships and developing new professional skill sets. As a corps member you spent a lot of time discerning your career path; as a new professional, you'll want to reflect on your experiences to confirm that you've made choices in line with your short- and long-term professional goals. Although this is a time for celebration for you, you may also feel a sense of loss as you adjust to a new life without your service community to support you.

Part Three offers concrete suggestions for transitioning to a new job, including basics like putting together an affordable professional starter wardrobe, the more complicated adventure of figuring out if your new position is a good fit, and taking ownership of



your work. You'll read about ways to adjust to increased income as well as to stay on top of trends in your field by connecting with people, reading industry publications, building your skills, and attending relevant professional gatherings.

## Section one: The shock of the new (starting a new job)

**Warning: this section is not for the faint-hearted (but read it anyway!).**

This section outlines some of the challenges of starting your new, post-corps job. Depending on your experiences in the corps, you won't experience all of the situations described here. Feel free to skip past the points of concern that don't resonate with your experience.

The challenges covered in this section include losing your unique status and possibly autonomy now that you're no longer a corps member, adjusting to your colleagues and the office culture, the open-ended job commitment, taking ownership of your work, adjusting to increased income, and evaluating your first three months. This section also offers very basic tips around professional dress.

### **Just a rookie on a new team**

As a corps member, you were unique. Even if your service site hosted a few corps members, you were a shorter-term contributor to the place and the role you filled was special. Depending on your program, you may have had a clearly negotiated work plan or position description that guided your duties towards your core mission. Although you didn't earn much money, you may have been the recipient of special attention and leadership opportunities expressly because you were in a corps. You may have had a designated orientation, a team of other corps members to learn with, and service corps program staff to connect you with the resources you needed. You may have also enjoyed latitude to wear more casual garb than staff (AmeriCorps T-shirts, for example) or set your own hours (if you lived in a remote village where you kept pace with local routines rather than conform to the 9-to-5 schedule typical of a U.S. nonprofit). By the end of your term you likely mastered your assignment and felt very established on your team, or among your network of community partners.

Now, you are just a rookie on a new team. As you've transitioned to a staff role, you'll likely find you won't warrant any exceptional treatment. As a staff member, you may find *less* hand-holding and *higher* performance expectations, a less exhaustive orientation, and less access to professional development. Unless you have joined the staff

### **STARTING SCHOOL**

Part Three of this *Companion* primarily focuses on completing the transition to a job, rather than the transition to college or graduate school.

For suggestions about making the most out of college, check out the article "Setting yourself up for success as an undergraduate" in Idealist's **Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center** ([www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/settingyourselfup.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/settingyourselfup.html)). The emphasis is on preparing for grad school, but the suggestions work for career preparation as well.

If you're starting graduate studies, check out "Are you ready for the lifestyle changes?" which is also in our grad school resource center ([www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/lifestylechangesgeneral.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/lifestylechangesgeneral.html)). The article focuses on adjusting to the grad school experience.





of the host site where you served during your term, you are probably starting from scratch on new projects that will take a while to master. Most nonprofits expect staff to wear multiple hats and take on tasks that aren't in their job description—something that may be exhilarating to you, or stymieing, depending on your disposition and the amount of work on your plate. If adjusting to these shifts is unnerving, rest assured you are obviously capable of handling such challenges—you've responded to tough situations before as a corps member.

### Action steps

- Give yourself time to learn the ropes, just as you did during your service term.
- Don't be afraid to communicate your needs with your supervisor so that you get the support and training you need to do your job well.
- If you struggle with this move, reach out to the corps members you served alongside to see how they are faring with their transition. Getting together after work or chatting with them on the phone might get you through this experience the way it got you through tough times when you were in the corps.
- Seek out other professional networks in your community. Local chapters of the associations of people in your field are a good place to start, for example. Networking groups like Young Nonprofit Professionals Networks and Green Drinks exist in cities throughout the United States.
- Depending on your preference, reach out to your new colleagues. A single trustworthy confidante can help you overcome self-doubt and guide you through awkward moments of your new job.

Chances are, you will stay in your job a year or longer, and you'll see that in no time your confidence in your new role will begin to match your feelings about the service project you've just left.

## Adjusting to your new colleagues and the office

You may also need time to adjust to your new colleagues and the office environment. While such adjustments aren't unique to former corps members, your recent service experience may be quite distinct from the backgrounds or recent activities of your new coworkers. Your term likely brought you into close contact with people and problems that can seem a world away from the confines of your new office, and you may feel that your colleagues' attitudes and sense of purpose don't match your own. But while your corps experience is one avenue to a career in public service, it's far from the only one.

### SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Situational, or contingency, leadership theory says that no single leadership style is appropriate under all circumstances, and that your leadership style can and should change as needed. Thinking about your term of service, you probably needed more support from your supervisor earlier in your term, and more independence from your supervisor later in your term. The same is likely to be true as you start out in a new role.

The problem is that not every manager adapts their leadership style according to the needs of their staff. The key to getting the support you need from your current boss is to ask for it directly and nicely, and to be persistent. This may mean asking for more meeting time with them in the beginning, more clarification of your tasks, more feedback on your performance, and more help with prioritizing your responsibilities. As you grow more comfortable in your position, asking for what you need may mean asking for more leeway and freedom to make your own decisions (within reason).

Your boss, although your superior in the organization, does not have super powers—they are human and as such the only way for them to “read your thoughts” is if you write them down in an email or communicate them in a meeting.

The more you and your manager and team communicate clearly in the beginning of your tenure at the organization, the better you'll be able to understand their expectations. Soon you'll be able to anticipate their style and needs, which will pay off over the long term.



### Action steps

- Give yourself some time to adjust, and proceed with an open mind. Your new colleagues likely have their own strong reasons for working in this field, and they simply may not be in a position to share their motivations amid the whirl of keeping their programs operational.
- As the new person in the office, do your best to professionally engage your new colleagues in the office—working on projects together and getting to know one another, you will move beyond this awkward initial stage.
- Invite them to take a coffee or lunch break outside of the office and create the opportunity to learn more about their background, passions, and personalities (as comfortable and appropriate as this feels for you). You can probably learn a lot from your colleagues' experiences, and you also have unique insights to share with them.

Ultimately, you may not agree with all your workmates on everything, but then, that's life—*vive la différence!*

## The open-ended job commitment

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During your service experience, you knew when your term was scheduled to end. Depending on your current position, you may be in an open-ended commitment with no specific deadline for moving on. Chances are, *you'll* decide when and how (and even if) you leave this position. That means you have the power and the freedom to leave, but also that you'll have to find new motivations for staying, and for improving your performance. There's nothing like an AmeriCorps Education Award or Peace Corps Readjustment Allowance awaiting you if you can stick it out for a few more months.

### Action steps

- You really do have to create your own intrinsic motivations, but the rewards are usually worth it: solving critical problems, growing professionally, emerging as a leader in your field, getting promoted to new roles, and determining your own path.
- Some of the steps you took during your discernment process (see pages 11-17 of [Part One](#) of this *Companion*) can help you now. Evaluating your experiences, for example, keeps you aware of how you're progressing, what you like and don't like. Prayer and meditation help some people understand their priorities better, and as a result the less important (but annoying) aspects of life can dissolve away.
- Also keep reading—pages 99-100 of this *Companion* cover the three-month review you should plan to take part in.



**Chances are,  
you'll decide  
when and how  
you leave this  
position."**



## Fashion tips for the post-service professional

While many service corps participants must dress very professionally throughout their term of service, others adopt clothing styles appropriate for life in their sub-Saharan village (where different cultural norms may inform local dress), or for the type of work they'll be doing—keeping up with kids, maintaining trails, or rebuilding cities after a natural disaster. Whether you've been wearing the same clothes for a couple of years as an international volunteer, or surviving in your City Year uniform or AmeriCorps T-shirt, you might want to take a little time to revamp your wardrobe.

During your job search, you might have gotten away with having one good, professional outfit for interviewing. Or, if you entered your service corps from a corporate background, you may have a closet chock full of business suits, which may or may not be useful in your new nonprofit role.

As you settle into a new job, you will want to feel and look your best in your new role. Therefore, it's wise to pull together a small wardrobe—enough for the first week—that will help you look professional (see sidebar).

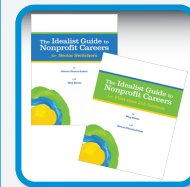
Before starting your first day, ask what the dress code is. Even if you have visited the office to interview and noticed how the staff dressed, save time and money by clarifying the dress code after you've gotten the job offer. In some situations, you may need to prioritize your professional image above your own self-expression, and/or follow safety guidelines, such as wearing closed-toe shoes and avoiding dangling jewelry. It's wise to ask before you purchase anything. If your organization is large enough, the human resources office might have guidelines prepared. Otherwise, ask your manager. Here are some basic tips and guidelines:

- Regardless of dress code, your clothes should be clean at the start of the day. Especially if you are in an office or indoor setting, your shoes also should be clean, and your clothes wrinkle-free.
- Avoid clothes with words printed on them, T-shirts, and clothes that reveal too much skin (i.e., plunging necklines, short skirts, sandals, inappropriately high heels, muscle T-shirts, anything see-through worn on a part of the body that shouldn't be seen publicly, etc.).

Invest in a few good, professional outfits according to the dress code of your organization. You don't have to buy expensive clothes, but know what you are looking for before you go shopping, or take a fashion-savvy friend with you. Always try an item on before you purchase it—a little time in the dressing room will save you money and hassle in the long run.

Sources of free or inexpensive clothes:

- Borrow from and/or exchange with friends (be sure to ask whether you need to return them, and by what date).
- Comb through consignment and thrift shops for professional clothes in good condition.
- Find discounted or inexpensive clothes at chain stores.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Nine of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) offers tips on making a good impression at your interview, but clothing and grooming can make a difference after you land a job, too.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html)

### NERVOUS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DRESS?

If you are starting your new job in an office setting, and you are unsure about what goes into a basic professional wardrobe, here are some general guidelines.

Aim to have a minimum of these items in your closet to make it through the first week without having to do laundry:

- Two pairs of dark-colored pants plus one dark-colored skirt for women
- Five shirts/blouses: collared, solid colors
- One suit jacket in case you need to dress up
- One pair of clean shoes

**Business casual:** Usually means slacks/skirt and a collared shirt or blouse, but interpretations vary, so play it conservatively at first until you get a clear sense of what to wear.

**Formal business attire:** Suit jacket, with matching pants or skirt. Dress shirt or blouse. Stockings or socks, dress shoes.



## Taking ownership of your work

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If you're like many corps members, at the end your term of service you felt on top of the world—you had mastered your projects and felt ready for anything. Embarking on a new career path, you may find yourself feeling low—looking up a steep learning curve or sitting at the bottom of the totem pole in the new organization. In your race to take the reins of your new work—to restore your place at the top of your game—you may face some resistance: colleagues who've been tackling a piece of the work that's now yours, a boss who has really firm ideas of the way things ought to be done, and/or an organizational culture that impedes change or embraces it slowly.

It's important for you to feel ownership over your new responsibilities, while at the same time figuring out how to balance the way things have been done with the way you'd like to do them.

### Action steps

- Be proactive, not passive. Make sure you know what is expected of you, and which aspects of your project you are personally responsible for. If it's helpful, create an action plan for yourself and share it with your supervisor and others with whom you share project assignments. Read about action plans on page 36 of [Part One](#) of this *Companion*.
- Give yourself time to get up to speed. Recognize that it will take time to feel knowledgeable in a new job, and that once you do, you'll likely feel more ownership over your work.
- Ask for reading and organizing days if you are learning a completely new field, e.g., you were working in public health policy previously but are now in economic development. Immerse yourself in the major publications, articles, and reports that can give you a better foundation for understanding and owning your work. Read on your own time, too.
- Take some time to organize your work space and files, especially if you've inherited documents and work from a current colleague or former employee.
- Ask questions, respectfully. Find out what's been done, and what the history is behind policies, as well as how things get carried out. Find out where there is room to make changes. Exploring these topics acknowledges that your organization and role have a story that predates you, and shows respect for what's happened before. As you learn where there is room for change, you can make suggestions or implement your ideas. Try not to sound disdainful of current policies—you won't win popularity points by disparaging the work of people around you, who likely created the policies (and who probably have solid reasons for them).
- Create a vision for your work. What possibilities can you imagine; what



do your colleagues and boss see happening in the future? What image can you connect with that inspires you to do your best work?

- Make a plan and achieve your goals. Keeping in mind the vision, set goals and assign priorities. People will accept that you're the owner of your work when they see you thinking ahead, making steady progress toward your goals, and succeeding on deadline.
- Find ways to do what you do best given your job priorities. If you are passionate about managing other people, ask about recruiting volunteers and interns. If you love to bake, set yourself up as the baker for staff celebrations.
- Report back. Let your boss and key colleagues know about your progress and difficulties. Especially at the beginning, more communication is better than less. If your boss seems anxious to relinquish control, offer them your daily and/or weekly priorities so that they can see what you are up to, as well as the logic behind your approach.
- Ask for help. If you are struggling with any aspect of your work, or having trouble taking ownership, ask for help. Unless you are in a job-training program, your biggest priority is your productivity. If you can't do it all on your own, your team would likely rather chip in than have you fail.
- Delegate when necessary. It's better to realize that you need help, rather than find out too late that you're not getting your work done, or missing deadlines. If you can, ask others—like volunteers, interns, colleagues, or even your boss—to take on specific tasks. Offer them clear and manageable guidance and deadlines.

If you find yourself struggling, remember that you were hired because several people in the organization were confident that you could do the work and that you were the best candidate for the job.

## Adjusting to increased income

If your new hourly wage or salary is significantly more than what you earned during your service term, you may face a period of adjustment. Sometimes the most stressful experiences can come from removing restrictions. You've been living in financial confinement, and now you have more wiggle room in your budget. The result can create unanticipated stress.

You may feel guilty about bringing in so much more money overnight, while many of the people you grew close to during your term of service are still struggling with poverty. You may have trouble recalibrating your budget when it has doubled or tripled from the levels you had while in the corps. Finally, you may at last be able to take care of expenditures you weren't able to before—repay student loans, invest in a computer or car, or buy a new pair of glasses.

## CROSS-CULTURAL RE-ENTRY

Some time in the months following the end of your service term, the emotional impact of your service experiences might start to catch up with you. If you've returned home after working in another culture (either overseas or within the United States), you may have been, up until now, busy reuniting with old friends, looking for a job, and catching up on things you used to love to do. As you start to settle in to the new normal, you might feel more acutely the loss of the communities you've left behind.

Cross-cultural re-entry means facing previously familiar surroundings after living in a different environment for a while. During your term, you were immersed in new perspectives—you adjusted slowly, and learned more every day. Now that you are home, you have to reconcile all that you have learned, all that you have become, with your old life (and how it, too, has changed in the interim).

If you are like many people returning home, you may struggle to stay true to the values, attitudes, and insights you gained during your service.

Give yourself time to overcome this "reverse culture shock", and to integrate the insights of your service into your current life and work.

Learn more about the challenges of coming home in the Idealist

**International Volunteerism Resource Center**, [www.idealists.org/en/ivrc/return.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/ivrc/return.html).

More advice on coping with re-entry is available in **Psychosocial**, at [www.idealists.org/en/psychosocial/reentry\\_index.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psychosocial/reentry_index.html).





## Action steps

- Open checking and savings accounts at a federally insured bank or credit union, if you don't already have them. People without checking and savings accounts pay higher transaction fees for cashing their paychecks, taking out small loans, and remitting money to family members in other countries. Also without an account to deposit money in, cash can be more easily stolen, lost (as in a house fire), and spent. Read more: <http://thenewservice.wordpress.com/2009/05/01/unbanked>.
- Create a budget for yourself. As you may have during your term, figure out how much of your money is going to expenses like rent, utilities, transportation, student loans, and food. At the end of the month, how much money is left over for savings, entertainment, and larger purchases?
- Pay yourself first. Save for long-term goals and larger purchases. If you'd like to invest in a computer but don't need it immediately, set aside a few hundred dollars a month until you've got enough. If you'd like to buy a home in the next few years, it's never too soon to save for your down payment. Set up a retirement account and responsible investments through your new job or an independent financial advisor (but it's best to avoid investing in things you don't understand—it's your money and no one has worked as hard to earn it, or cares about its future as much as you do). For all of these goals, living on a budget during the corps was great practice for becoming a wise steward of your financial resources now.
- Separately, brainstorm your wish list of one-time expenses—and then prioritize the items on it. For example, you may want to make a donation to an organization that's meant a lot to you, purchase a bicycle, and buy a new watch. Make decisions on what you can afford to take care of first based on how much it costs and how soon you need it. If you need a bike to get around, for example, that might be the top priority among the examples above.
- Remember to enjoy your new income. Decide on a reasonable monthly allowance for yourself, that you can spend on eating out, movies, gifts, and other casual expenditures that come up more often. An allowance will let you spend money guilt-free, but also keep your spending within limits that make sense given your overall budget.
- Educate yourself. Learn how to build a good credit history—including the careful use of credit cards. Talk with family and friends about how they manage their money, and for ideas about financial planners you can trust. Often community-based banks or credit unions offer free, basic financial literacy workshops. Also look for home-buying workshops that can take you through the steps of buying a home, starting with learning more about your credit score and saving for the down payment.

## FINANCIAL EDUCATION AND PLANNING RESOURCES

Check out **Making a Difference: A Guide to Personal Profit in a Nonprofit World**, a free PDF book from Idealist.org and the National Endowment for Financial Education.

[www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html)

The **Financial Planning Association** has great resources for the general public.

[www.fpaforfinancialplanning.org](http://www.fpaforfinancialplanning.org)

**Money Smart Adult Financial Education Curriculum** is a free tool from the FDIC you can use by yourself and with people in your community.

[www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/overview.html](http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/overview.html)

**MyMoney.gov** is the website of the U.S. Financial Literacy and Education Commission.

[www.mymoney.gov](http://www.mymoney.gov)

**Get Rich Slowly** is a blog that covers topics like planning well and living simply.

[www.getrichslowly.org/blog/](http://www.getrichslowly.org/blog/)

**Mint.com** is a free online financial budgeting tool that can also keep track of all your financials in one place.

[www.mint.com](http://www.mint.com)

It's a good idea to check your credit history once a year. The website **Annual Credit Report** is the official site that offers you free reports from the three credit reporting agencies. You don't get your FICO score (the three-digit number that tells a lending institution how credit-worthy you are), but you do get to review your credit history, and check for errors or acts of fraud against you.

[www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)





- Just because you have more money doesn't mean you have to spend it. From your service term and maybe other life experiences, you know that you can live successfully on little money, borrowing books and DVDs from the library rather than buying them, and enjoying free community events. Use that sense of thrift to your advantage as your income grows throughout your life. One famous example of living modestly is Warren Buffet—one of the wealthiest businessmen in the world—who still lives in the modest house in Omaha, NE that he bought for \$31,500 in 1957.

## Evaluating the first three months

Many people quit their jobs during the first three months. In the initial months in a new position, a new hire has more time to fully grasp the job description, working conditions, organizational culture, colleagues, and manager—more than they could have during a few interviews, even if they were proactive about researching the organization's culture during the interview process (See Chapter Seven of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* for more on evaluating organizational culture). Beyond those factors, it's also safe to say that a new hire—fresh from the throes of a major job search—may be offered a job at another organization that was slower in making their decision.

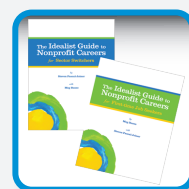
### Action steps

- Time flies. If all is going well, you shouldn't be asking yourself if you want to stick around. With any luck, you'll be diving right into your tasks, getting along with your colleagues, and feeling challenged by the opportunities you have in front of you.
- Evaluation. Just as you relied on first-hand experiences during your term of service, be aware of how you feel when you are on the job now: Excited? Annoyed? Energized? Depleted? Do you have the chance each day to do what you're best at? Are you learning what you hoped to learn? Is your job what you thought it would be? Are the number of hours expected of you per week sustainable? Keeping tabs on yourself and your new activities can help you discern what you love and don't love to do as part of your job.
- Three month review. Many organizations offer new employees a three month review—a time to check in formally with their managers, receive an initial performance evaluation, and find out if any improvements can be made in communication or execution of job tasks. If your organization doesn't offer a standard review to all new employees, take the initiative to request one. Use the three-month mark as a time to take stock in your experiences so far and to see if the job is heading in the direction you had hoped it would, to find out how your supervisor rates your progress and

### AWKWARD TO HAVE MORE INCOME? IT CAN BE

It was a huge transition for me to have an income after two years of VISTA and realizing that I didn't have to count pennies to make it through the month—I had private college loans to pay and other bills to worry about. Related to the workplace, during the initial period of getting to know coworkers and adjusting my relationship to money, I felt the competing pressure of socializing with coworkers (eating or going out) to get to know them and to “belong”, with that of not yet feeling comfortable with the spending of money that often comes with hanging out. Other ways this affected me was in gift-giving, buying accessories for the new job such as a wardrobe and luggage since travel is involved...

—Jung Fitzpatrick, AmeriCorps VISTA alumna and Graduate Education Communications Coordinator, Idealist.org



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Seven of *The*

*Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) offers insights on how to determine if your workplace suits your personality and preferences.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch7.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch7.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch7.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch7.html)



accomplishments, and to set goals for the rest of the year. The three-month review is also a good time to formally track and share skill development, accomplishments, and tasks you've been working on.

- **Manager madness.** Most people leave their bosses, not their jobs or their organizations. If you aren't getting what you need from your boss, make sure to ask for it clearly. Keep reading for self-assessment questions that may help you gauge where your relationship with your boss may need improvement.

## Time to move on?

Always take seriously the decision to quit a job very soon after you've started. Give the new job a chance to prove itself to you. But what are some red flags that suggest this may not be the right job for you? *First Break All the Rules*, a book that summarizes results of a survey conducted with millions of employees at organizations and companies around the world, lists the 12 keys to staff satisfaction that managers have some power to control.<sup>1</sup> According to authors Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, people who offer a no, or a lukewarm yes, to the following questions are the ones most motivated to leave their jobs:

- Do I know what is expected of me at work?
- Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
- At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
- In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
- Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
- Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
- At work, do my opinions seem to count?
- Does the mission of my [organization] make me feel my job is important?
- Are my coworkers committed to doing quality work?
- Do I have a best friend at work?
- In the last six months, has someone talked with me about my progress?
- This last year, have I had opportunities to learn and grow?

The first few months at a new job are rarely the smoothest of times. The learning curve is steep, you're meeting new people with whom you'll spend a good part of your day, and you're adjusting to the new requirements of your position. This is a period when it pays to persevere. Take more time to understand your role, gain ownership over your projects, understand the organizational culture, and bond with others on staff.

<sup>1</sup> Buckingham, Marcus and Curt Coffman. *First Break All the Rules: What the World's Great Managers Do Differently* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999

## THE FIRST 100 DAYS: TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL START

- Don't be unprepared for your first day; go back and review all of the research you did on the organization during the application process.
- 90 percent listen, 10 percent talk is a good initial rule of thumb.
- Ask which of your new colleagues will be particularly beneficial to speak with early on—people who know your work area well or have specific institutional knowledge to share—then make a point to chat with them.
- Seek out a mentor within the organization.
- Have a frank discussion with your manager about any unwritten rules or expectations. Let them know you're open to revisiting the topic as new situations crop up. Also feel free to seek clarification of performance metrics and expectations.
- Be aware of (but avoid getting caught up in) the always-present office politics. Again, listen much more than you speak.
- Don't go in thinking you'll "fix" everything. If you want to change the way something's always been done, be modest, patient, and polite with your ideas.
- (In the beginning), it's okay to not know where the bathroom is. Or the kitchen. Or the fax machine. Or...
- Pay attention to office conventions and abide by them, at least until you understand the environment. Even relatively informal offices may still have some taboos about dress codes or the manner in which staff address one another—give yourself a chance to learn these often unwritten "rules."
- Taking vacation during your first few months may not be allowed, and is probably not a good idea if you can avoid it.
- Be conscious of potentially annoying habits like gum-chewing, mobile phone ring tones, long or loud phone calls, humming, singing, and pen-tapping.





## BEA'S STORY: THE SHOCK OF THE NEW

Bea has been hired by the nonprofit Farm Adventure to implement the expansion of its Kids2Farm program, introducing children to local organic farms through summer camps and field trip tours and cooking classes. Bea has felt very lucky in finding her dream job before her term of service ended. She's been excited to leverage her relationships with organic farmers in the region to teach kids and create a new generation of consumers for the organic food movement.

However, until recently she has had no idea how many serious adjustments she would need to make in her new role. For starters, she didn't realize that while farmers are ecstatic to sell their produce to public schools (to them, it means a reliable source of income), it is much harder for them to commit the money and time to opening up their farms to an after-school program and the responsibility of supervising the kids. The "pilot" program that Bea read about was somewhat successful, but Farm Adventure only partnered with a single farm, and that farm recently decided to stop hosting the project.

She learns very fast that the fundamental business model of Kids2Farm is flawed. It offers too little to the farms. Worse, Bea doesn't have the clout at her organization to change the way the system is supposed to work.

Her manager, Sophie, tells her, "We've hired you because we have confidence that you can get this done." On the surface it sounds like a vote of confidence, but underneath—and against her better judgment—Bea hears a threat: "If you cannot get this done, we shouldn't have hired you to begin with." Bea is almost certain she's going to lose her job.

Another troubling aspect of her new role is Bea no longer has a team leader to coach her through the difficult times. Jim, her team leader from her service corps, is very busy with his own new job in an academic library; he's been uncharacteristically formal on their recent phone calls.

Bea's mentor, Julia, encourages Bea to call some farmers she knows well to see if they have some insights.

Bea decides to call Lianne, a farmer who was a mentor to Bea during her term of service last year. Together they come up with a plan. If it is successful, Lianne will spread the word to other farmers herself. The idea is to initially focus on developing an internship program for a limited number of high schoolers. They could learn how to *run* a farm—how to build structures the farm needs to grow crops year-round; how to propagate, plant, and harvest the crops; how to work in a greenhouse. Then the high schoolers would be *contributing* to the farm, and this eventually would free up some time for the farm workers who would be able to



### BEA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

guide them and coordinate other aspects of the program. If successful, the high schoolers could become volunteer leaders during the second semester of the program, and with support, they could lead elementary-aged kids on the tours.

Bea still would have to figure out the liability issues, but she knows a lawyer from her term of service who might be able to help her. And at least she now has a farm willing to try the partnership. With some convincing, Sophie signs on to the idea.

Bea's first months on the job have been rocky but in the end, validating. She is glad she wasn't fired and didn't have to quit. She is pleased **she has been able to persevere**. And although she needed to adjust to life without a team leader and other close supporters, she is really glad **she has the relationships from her service year** with Julia, Lianne, and others.

## Section two: Career growth beyond your service term

As you start your new career, you'll want to stay on top of trends and job opportunities in your field, and to continue building skills and networks. Chapter Eleven of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* offers strategies for staying "job-search-ready," including:

- Updating your "master" resume (the resume that is multiple pages in length, listing everything you've done, which you tailor to one or two pages each time you apply for a job)
- Documenting your accomplishments (see [Part One](#) of this *Companion*)
- Keeping your options open
- Continuing to assess yourself

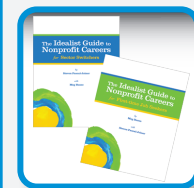
In addition, other ways to keep yourself in shape professionally include ongoing self assessment and evaluation, networking, keeping your skills current, and building your skills. All of these are discussed below.

### Ongoing self assessment and evaluation

As you get settled in a new career, take the time to reflect on your satisfaction with your work, and whether the role you're playing, the organization you've joined, and the issue you are tackling all still move you in the direction you want to go.



Stay on top of trends and job opportunities in your field, and continue building skills and networks."



#### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

##### Chapter Eleven of *The*

*Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) focuses on simple ways to keep yourself primed for the possibility of future transitions.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch11.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch11.html)



Beyond evaluating your current job and organization, think about the field you are working in, the role you are playing. Are you excited about the key tasks in your position description, or do you procrastinate on them by tackling minor activities? Are you curious to learn more and improve your skills? Does recapping your day with friends usually make you happy—or do you find yourself avoiding mention of your work life as much as possible?

As part of ongoing self assessment and evaluation, it's wise to continue to look at job openings from time to time—what else is out there, who is hiring, and how much money are people with your skills making? Do other jobs seem like a better fit? What strategic networks, new skills, and trends should you be adopting to keep up with current demands in the market?

If you completed the Career Tracks Exercise—described in [Part One](#) of this *Companion* and in more detail in Chapter Three of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*—you came up with a few career tracks for yourself. Choosing several career tracks helps you focus your job search and articulate your career goals. As you consider your options moving forward, you can keep in mind the career tracks you created, and add new ones as you develop new passions and skill sets.

Evaluating your experience, continuing to make your qualifications relevant, and keeping an eye on the job market will help you determine when the next move might be necessary.



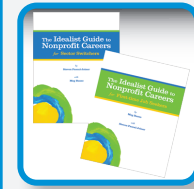
### CESAR'S STORY: ONGOING SELF ASSESSMENT

Cesar ends his service at the community center for immigrants and continues the part-time job he started during his term, working the front desk at the YMCA. All of his savings have gone to make car payments and he worries that without a financial safety net he might have to sell his car. Fortunately, he has been able to enroll in the Massachusetts health plan.

Within a few weeks, his former supervisor Karen calls him. Karen explains that the community center where Cesar has recently ended his service has funding for a new corps member who wouldn't be a classroom teacher. Cesar asks if she can email him more information about the opportunity.

Cesar looks at the information she sends. The new position focuses on building the capacity of the host site, to increase the community center's ability to offer GED test preparation support to refugees with limited English skills. His role would be to help establish a new adult basic education program, and to find funding to help launch the program the following year.

The more Cesar reads, the more he feels that another term of service would give



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

You can find the complete

Career Tracks Exercise in **Chapter Three** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html)



### CESAR'S STORY (CONTINUED)

him the training he needs to continue serving immigrants and refugees—his few weeks away from this community has helped him realize how important they've been to him. The new role would also help him make the switch from direct service to program management—definitely the direction he wants to go in his career.

Cesar is happy at the thought that he wouldn't have to teach in the classroom, but could still be involved in the lives and education of the people he's come to care about at the center. He considers the possibility over a long weekend, praying to make the right decision. Monday, he applies for the non-teaching corps member position. Karen hires him.

While the position suits him, there are a few downsides: the health plan for the service corps is very limited, and the pay is such that he can no longer afford his monthly car payments. Cesar decides to stick with his state health plan and sell his car, putting the money into his savings account in case he needs it this year. He resigns himself to using public transportation for most trips, and to carpool if he needs to, especially when it's crucial to be on time.

As his second term of service progresses, Cesar finds himself continuing to engage in the discernment process he began last year. Because so much of his work involves building community partnerships and meeting new people who can help him build his program, he finds that networking is both easier and more valuable to him this year in his non-teaching role. He develops deeper relationships with a few of the community center's students, because they're serving on his advisory board—helping him shape the new program. The new term also gives him the chance to ask a wide array of people about their career paths, thereby getting advice about his own next steps.

He learns a great deal about the field of adult basic education, and about grant-writing. He realizes that his skills as a salesman can actually come in handy for “selling” his program to potential partners and funders. He is excited about his new role and relieved as the disparate experiences he's had all come together to help him serve the community better. He had faith that things would come together, and he is thankful that they have.



**Giving back to your network is one form of service that can carry you through the rest of your life.”**

## Networking after your service program

Giving back to your networks—by sharing time, resources, and energy—is one form of service that can carry you through the rest of your life, no matter what you choose to do for a career. Likewise, networks are naturally helpful to you as you advance your career. Just as you collaborated with organizations and leaders as a corps member, as a professional you can draw on the strength of your networks to meet new people,





learn about news and trends in your field, and work together to build a better future for your community.

## Existing relationships

Before you lose track of all of the people who helped you get to the starting line of your new job, take time to update everyone with your current contact information, and thank the people who helped you reach your new position. For the most part, it's okay to send a mass email to update people with your new contact information. Similarly, a Facebook update or a Twitter message is a wonderful way for your casual connections to learn your news. You might, however, seriously consider writing individual thank you notes or emails to people who were key to your job search. Don't be stingy about thanking people—even if someone's job lead didn't work out for you, they tried and will want to know that you landed on your feet.

As you start in your new role, also consider reaching out to people in your existing networks to brainstorm ways to continue working together in meaningful collaborations—especially if you are in the same community where you served in the corps.

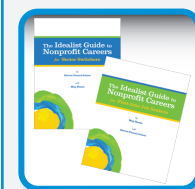
## Building new relationships

When you were a corps member, you may have had to start from scratch establishing an entirely new network of partners, mentors, and allies in your community. Look back on what helped you succeed in building those ties as you move on in your new role. Are there any specific people, groups, or networking events that got you started? Anything that can help you now, again, as you rebuild? Take some time to look back to page 32 in [Part One](#) of this *Companion* at the discussion about building new community partners.

## How your service corps network is unique

Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* covers a wide range of groups you should consider as part of your network, including social clubs, alumni of your school, and people in your faith community. As an alum of a service corps, you have additional networks—allies from the service corps community, people who may be more willing to open their door to you. These allies may include:

**Alumni of your own service program**—people who shared your term, who came along before or after you, and people who served in your city, state, or host country, as well as people who served in other places. If it exists, your service corps staff probably bragged about its alumni group from the moment you expressed an interest in applying for the corps. If one doesn't exist—or is not active locally—consider being part of the movement to create an alumni group for your corps. Your service network may extend far and wide, and can help you take the ongoing pulse of national and international trends in public service.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Learn more  
about groups

you can network with in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

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**Alumni of other service corps**—related to yours or not. Service corps participation is humbling—little pay, long hours, giant learning curve, cross-cultural challenges. You may find you have a lot in common with former participants of other service corps, and appreciate the diverse experience others bring to projects on which you partner. Find out if there is an alumni group in your community and learn how to get involved. See a list of alumni groups at [www.idealistservice.org](http://www.idealistservice.org).

**Host site staff and other community members you worked with as a corps member**—stay in touch with the people you worked with during your term of service. The staff of your host site and other organizations will find you a valuable member of their network as you progress in your career, and you should feel comfortable to call on them for assistance, connections, and advice. They will want to hear from you. You can keep them in the loop with your new job by sending emails occasionally, asking for an insight here or there, or remembering them on their birthday.

**Your service corps program staff and currently serving corps members**—alone or with other alumni, you can be a source of support for your program as an advocate, donor, and mentor for current members. If you live nearby, volunteer to speak on a panel discussion, join the board of directors or ambassadors, or host a potluck for the incoming group. Join a service project that current corps members organize. Volunteer to recruit new corps members, and serve as a community reader for host site proposals. If your corps has no formal alumni group, listserv, or Facebook page, consider organizing one, starting with your peers, and gradually reaching out to current and past corps members. Stay in touch with your own team.

Finally, as you embark on a new job in public service, you may not have to try hard to stay in touch with some former corps members. Among your colleagues in your new job may be many graduates of service corps. A recent study has shown that eight years out, two-thirds of AmeriCorps alums are still engaged in nonprofit and government careers.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, two-thirds of Teach For America corps members stay in the education field after their term ends; in other teaching corps whose express mission is to create new teachers, the statistics are often even higher.

If you are living in a new place now, don't forget to build a personal network, too. It's easy to feel lonely in a new place at first, even if you have a handful of friends there. But after the first few months you'll start to feel more adjusted. Take the time to pursue your hobbies and talk to people you meet. Volunteering is a good way to contribute to your new town, meet interesting and smart people who are volunteering alongside you, and learn what's happening in your area.

<sup>2</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service and Abt Associates Inc., "Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni" May 2008. Available at: [www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/08\\_0513\\_longstudy\\_report.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/08_0513_longstudy_report.pdf)

## ADVOCATING FOR YOUR SERVICE CORPS

If you are eager to advocate for national and international service now that you are an alum, here are some places to get started:

**AmeriCorps Alums**, the independent group of former AmeriCorps members, includes in its mission national service advocacy. [www.americorpsalums.org](http://www.americorpsalums.org)

**National Peace Corps Association**, the independent organization of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, offers support to returning volunteers and also advocates for Peace Corps. [www.peacecorpsconnect.org](http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org)

**Service Nation**, a campaign of Be the Change, Inc., is a coalition of hundreds of nonprofits that has worked to expand service opportunities and increase volunteerism and citizenship in the United States. [www.servicenation.org](http://www.servicenation.org)

**Voices For National Service** works to advocate for the growth and strengthening of national service, while educating the public and elected leaders about the impact of national service. It links to legislation summaries and texts, and sponsors an annual Capitol Hill Day to bring service corps alumni to meet their elected officials and talk about their service experiences. [www.voicesforservice.org](http://www.voicesforservice.org)

## LISTEN TO A PODCAST

Check out the Idealist.org Careers podcast interview with Bob Grimm from The Corporation for National and Community Service, about the what former AmeriCorps members are doing eight years out:

<http://thenewservice.wordpress.com/2008/08/15/eightyearsoutpodcast/>





### ACE'S STORY: CONTINUED CAREER GROWTH

Ace apprentices at Solar NOLA, installing solar panels to increase the energy efficiency of recently rebuilt homes in New Orleans. He gets along with his mentor Rod and enjoys making a decent pay check. But he's not sure that installing solar panels will be his life's work. Once he learns the fundamentals and moves beyond his apprenticeship, he finds the work repetitive. He loves the others on his crew, though, and he respects Rod's leadership and the opportunity to learn a trade.

He has remained friends with his old teammates from his service corps. One day his friends Mike and Todd approach him about a business idea they have. They want to start a company that deconstructs old buildings and houses and resells the salvageable materials in a retail store. Mike and Todd anticipate needing deconstruction specialists and a business manager to run the store and market the business. Because they all took apart buildings when they were in the corps together, they hope that Ace could lead the deconstruction team.

Ace loves the idea. He acknowledges that he still has a lot to learn, but he looks forward to taking apart buildings in a way that preserves their component parts, and learning to tell the difference between materials that will go for resale and the materials that will have to be recycled or trashed. He accepts the job offer, though he stays on part-time with Solar NOLA until the new business picks up speed and offers him a steady income so he can support himself and his daughter.

## Keeping your knowledge and skills current

You can stay up to date with your field by following industry journals, online newsletters, and blogs.

To find out what the journals are in your field, look online, or ask a librarian, colleagues, or counterparts at other organizations. If you can't afford your own subscription to journals, try finding these publications at a library. Many professional associations have their own journals with the latest trends and research affecting the field.

Blogs are a good source of free, current information with links to other relevant news sources. One way to search for relevant journals and blogs is to type keywords into a web search window. Alternately, you can create a Google Alert ([www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)) using your keywords. Anytime new content appears on the web using your

### THE NEW SERVICE: A BLOG FOR SERVICE FOLKS

The **New Service** blog from Idealist.org and partners covers career and education topics for service corps members, staff, and alumni. Amy Potthast, the author of this *Companion*, is the editor of The New Service.

[www.idealistservice.com](http://www.idealistservice.com)



same keywords, you'll get an email about it. Google Alerts saves you time by sending search results to you regularly. Reading through these search results and following their links can help you identify the leading people and organizations in your field, learn the vocabulary useful for talking about your work, and understand the controversies and opportunities of the day.

As you find blogs that you want to read regularly, subscribe to them using a blog reader like Google Reader or Netvibes. A blog reader is similar to an extra email inbox just for new blog posts; they allow you to subscribe to any RSS feed. (Look for the RSS icon in your web browser's window—the icon is a blue or orange square with three diagonal stripes. After you've created an account in a blog reader and have logged in to it, click on the RSS icon to subscribe. You can also copy and paste the blog's URL into the reader.) Blog readers also allow you to share posts with others, and to email blog posts to friends.

Leaving blog comments is also a great networking tool to get to know the big players in the field and to get your name on their radar. Most bloggers—even the big ones—read comments and notice when someone is an active and ongoing participant on their sites. If you plan to leave a comment on a blog post, maintain a professional tone (you don't know who will read the comment); be thoughtful—assume your comment will remain visible to everyone forever; make sure you've read the blog post thoroughly; and offer your further thoughts and insights. It's fine to disagree and to offer counter-arguments. If you have questions for the blog post's author, be sure to leave your email address in case they want to follow up with you directly.

You might find you'd like to join the conversation and start your own blog. Writing regularly for your own blog (or sharing one with friends) is a big commitment to make, but it can inspire you to stay up-to-date on what is going on in your field more than reading blogs regularly does. Blogging about professional topics opens the door to new networks—people who are passionate about the same things you are, and who find you through your blog. Blogging also gives your prospective employers a chance to glimpse your writing style and your familiarity with the field.

Likewise, Twitter is a way to find and connect with people who care about issues you do, or play similar roles within their organizations. To hone in on these people, search keywords through Twitter's "Find People" function, or through the search tool on your preferred Twitter client. On some clients, such as Tweet Deck, you can keep several searches running all the time in their own window. See what people are talking about, what trends they point to, and how you can keep your organization's practices current.



RSS feed icon

Also stay current through regular conversations with your network (see above) and by attending events and relevant meetings and conferences for your field, when possible. Finally, if a local university offers classes or training in your field, request reading suggestions or a copy of course syllabi from professors or department administrators.



### DEENA'S STORY: CONTINUED CAREER GROWTH

Deena, the former bakery owner who came to volunteer in small business development in Ecuador, has prepared very well for her career transition during the last year of her term. Beyond building solid relationships with people who were well informed about opportunities, Deena has accomplished a great deal, helped elevate the incomes of dozens of families, and documented her work in numbers, writing, and photos. But as her service comes to a close, she senses she hasn't done enough for her own career transition—or perhaps, that more is out of her control than she'd previously thought.

She's applied for many jobs throughout the developing world that would build on her skills, and very few people have gotten back to her. Over beer with Lloyd, a fellow international volunteer, he suggests she isn't using her networks enough *now* to actually secure interviews with these organizations and catch their attention. He suggests she drop names more.

“So-and-so let me know about this opening,” Lloyd says. “Put yourself in their shoes. You are thousands of miles away from the office where your cover letter's being read. The farther you are, the more anonymous and possibly irrelevant you'll seem—unless they have programs on the ground in Ecuador. But even then, they'll want to know if their staff in Ecuador is acquainted with you and your work. Don't make them *ask*. Just *tell* them who you know.”

Taking Lloyd's advice, Deena starts to include the names of mutual contacts in her cover letters, and even asks people she knows to reach out to hiring organizations, and to vouch for her early in the application process—before hiring managers make decisions about whom to interview.

As part of this effort, Deena gets in touch with many of the people in her network again, including Veronica. Veronica works for the U.S. State Department and used to be stationed at the embassy in Quito, Ecuador. Before she left, Veronica was very helpful to Deena.

Veronica emails Deena right back. She tells Deena about a new micro-credit organization getting off the ground in Phoenix. “I know you want to work abroad, but this place might be a good fit for you right now.”

The organization, NativeEntrepreneurs.org, aims to use the internet to start



### DEENA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

connecting micro-philanthropists with start-up businesses on American Indian reservations. Veronica describes it as “a Kiva.org for Native American entrepreneurs.” And it needs people like Deena, trained in cultivating and training new entrepreneurs, and helping them through the micro-loan process.

Deena reads the position description on Idealist.org. She doesn't have the education background in business administration that the organization is looking for, but she agrees it's worth a shot. Before Deena has even sent in her resume and cover letter, Veronica sends a note to the founder of the new organization, letting him know to expect to hear from a winning candidate soon.

In the end, the hiring manager at NativeEntrepreneurs.org is willing to wait until Deena's term is up and to interview her in person. Within a month of the first interview, Deena accepts her new position and relocates to Phoenix—a city she's barely visited. But she had been willing to move anywhere for the right fit.

She really enjoys her new position, but begins to realize why a Masters in Business Administration would be helpful. One of her new colleagues is a recent graduate of an international business school in Glendale, not too far away. Deena starts doing her research on the school and discovers that it would be a great place for her to study because it has both an international perspective and a part-time MBA program for professionals.



Whatever the barriers, it's worth it to seek out professional development and education.”

## Continuing to build your skills

One challenge many recent corps members face is the sudden dearth of training. Those free, mandatory, in-service trainings you may have taken for granted last year may be starting to look awfully good to you in hindsight. Scholarships that flowed freely to you as a service corps participant may not be as easy to come by now that you are a permanent staff member of an organization. Whatever the barriers, it's still worth it to seek out professional development and education.

[Part One](#) of this *Companion* offers many suggestions for locating training opportunities in your community. If you're living someplace new, you may need to start researching professional development opportunities from scratch. Otherwise, you can seek support from the organizations you learned about as a service corps participant.

Besides formal professional development training, other avenues for building skills include:

**Volunteering, including board service.** Contributing your time to a nonprofit or school can offer you a chance to give back to your local community, build new





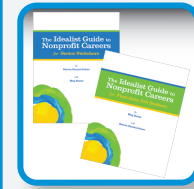
skills, and even receive (free!) training. You may have a chance to take leadership on a project, and raise your profile within the organization you're serving. By doing your best job—as you did during your term of service—you'll develop fans and build relationships that may be key to getting your “day job” done well. Board service comes with some strings attached—often a minimum financial commitment, regular meetings, and legal responsibilities.

**Going to school part-time, or taking one class at a time.** Going back to school is often perceived as an all-encompassing proposition, but increasingly it's possible to balance both work and study. Part-time programs, single classes, courses on evenings and weekends, and distance/online learning are all alternatives to the traditional full-time approach. Weigh the many advantages to you, such as the ability to continue earning an income while in school, against disadvantages like having little time for personal pursuits, friends, and family. And though it is possible, balancing study with work and family can also be exhausting—read more on Idealist's Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center ([www.idealists.org/gradschool](http://www.idealists.org/gradschool)).

Programs and individual courses geared towards working professionals are increasingly available at community colleges, universities, and grad schools. Schools may offer evening and weekend classes, online discussions, and other formats that facilitate student participation at a time and place convenient for them.

Individual courses can help you prepare for college or grad school, master material better and faster than simply reading, brush up on a subject you used to know well, and understand principles in a field more clearly. Courses may be offered by the relevant department, or through a department called Continuing Education or Community Education. Private, for-profit schools exist that can also help you. For example, Berlitz is a well known franchise of language schools.

**Certification.** A certification program is a set of courses in a particular field that leads to certificate status or a license to practice. Whether you need the skills to improve your current work or need a license to start practicing in your field, certification demonstrates to you and to potential employers that you have attained certain knowledge of and experience in your field. Field requirements often dictate both what certifications exist, and the means to obtain them. Therefore, prerequisites for certification can include any combination of the following: completing coursework, earning a degree, passing examinations, and/or successfully completing an internship or other experiential component. Sometimes certification is part of a degree program, while other times it's independent.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

### Chapter Five of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) contains short discussions of volunteering, board service, further education, and other ways to strengthen your skills and enhance your knowledge.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch5.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch5.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch5.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch5.html)





### ED'S STORY: CONTINUED CAREER GROWTH

Ed relocates to Portland, OR after serving two years as a volunteer English teacher at a college in China. He moves in with his daughter's family, with the plan to move out and find his own apartment after a month. But since he's such a help around the house, his daughter and her husband invite him to stay indefinitely, which also helps him save on rent.

He divides his time between taking care of his grandkids and the part-time job tutoring adult job seekers at a nonprofit computer lab that he secured before he left China. Very soon after starting his new job, another instructor who teaches basic accounting and spreadsheet skills announces she is quitting. Ed isn't looking for more hours, but he is willing to step up to help out in a pinch. Fortunately, the computer lab finds a permanent replacement after three weeks, but Ed realizes that he would be a stronger teacher if he knew the accounting and spreadsheet software better.

He begins looking for his own classes to take and finds a community college that offers a certification program in accounting software; the price is manageable so he enrolls. After many decades as a teacher, he is tickled to be on the other side of the classroom again. He finds that being a computer student really improves his ability to be an effective computer teacher, because it puts him in the position of beginner, and he is reminded of how foreign a new concept can seem.

After two terms at the community college, Ed earns his certification. He uses it to ask for a pay raise at the lab. His boss offers him a modest raise, but also invites him to take over the accounting class, because the "permanent replacement" has already moved on. Ed accepts, and enjoys practicing his new skills with the students. He feels proud of what he's accomplished. Not bad for an old coot, he thinks.

## Conclusion

If you took advantage of your term of service opportunity to its fullest potential—by engaging with others in your community and field, collaborating, exercising new skill sets, and figuring out how well it all suited you—then you already know best practices for furthering your career as a new professional.

Starting out as a new professional has some great perks—a salary, for starters. But you may at first find yourself missing some of the advantages of the old corps, like the training and support you probably took for granted. With time you'll adjust and learn to lean on your manager, colleagues, and network for continued learning and growth.



## SUMMARY

Even after successfully transitioning into your post-service position, you may still have some adjusting to do. Getting the job isn't so much the end of the transition, as a new beginning.

**New employees often experience a few shocks** (pages 92-102) as they get settled into their new job. Sometimes it takes time to get acclimated to the office culture or feel comfortable interacting with your coworkers. Even seemingly mundane matters like new norms for clothing can impact your adjustment. Other issues have to do with the new levels of responsibility in your role, the open-ended nature of many jobs (they don't have a pre-determined end date like many service corps), and—yes—even the question of how to handle the income that accompanies your work. You may also wonder if you've made the right decision in accepting this job. Continuing self assessment and patience can go a long way toward smoothing out these potential bumps in the road.

Now that you've got a job, you may also be tempted to abandon (or at least pack away) some of the good habits that got you through your transition—that would be a mistake! In order to stay ready for the opportunities and challenges that await you, **continue to focus on your career growth** (pages 102-112). Ways to do this include regular self assessment and evaluation of your present situation and goals, continuing to nurture and contribute to your network, and maintaining the skills and knowledge you already have while also seeking opportunities to acquire new skills and abilities.

## You are here

- This is **Part Three**. The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealists.org/servicecompanion](http://www.idealists.org/servicecompanion).

### About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

**Action Without Borders** is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. [Idealist.org](http://www.idealists.org), a project of Action Without Borders, is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, find opportunities and supporters, and turn their good intentions into action.

*Service Corps to Social Impact Career – A Companion to The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* by Amy Potthast is a product of Action Without Borders' Careers and Service Team based in Portland, OR. This team works to support individuals and organizations with graduate education options; HR and volunteer management resources; and job, internship, and domestic and global volunteer opportunities. Published in 2009 by Action Without Borders.



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## Final thoughts

### Conclusion Overview

This brief Conclusion contains:

- A quick reminder of the value of your experience and a recap of this *Companion* (pages 114-115)
- A final check-in with the characters who've accompanied you throughout the book (pages 115-116)
- Some advice about connecting your passions to your career trajectory, while keeping it all in perspective (page 117)
- A personal perspective from the author (page 117)

The experience you've gained during your service year will be invaluable to you for the rest of your life—providing a unique perspective and understanding of the world. Your volunteer experience may even help you determine and find the type of work that's meaningful in the future.

Practices like being an active and generous participant within your own network, documenting your accomplishments, and finding creative ways to learn and refine new skills can all help you sustain your career development for a lifetime.

- The same practices that have established you as a leader in the corps will help you develop into a leader at school or in any organization.
- Likewise, what you've learned about the job search during your transition from corps to career will likely inform all of your future job searches.

[Part One](#) of this *Companion* outlined things to do during your term of service—or during any organizational tenure—to prepare you for your next steps: discerning your professional calling, building relevant skills for short- and long-term goals, building community partnerships and other key relationships, and gathering evidence of your accomplishments.



[Part Two](#) focused on the job search skills you need during the transition, as they specifically relate to leveraging your service corps experience (while *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* focus more comprehensively on all the job search skills you or anyone needs to succeed). Part Two emphasized strategies for overcoming some of the unique challenges of transitioning from corps to career, translating your service experience during the job search and application process, and some options you have outside the nonprofit sector (the nonprofit sector is contrasted with other sectors in Chapter One of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*).

[Part Three](#) focused on starting a new job and overcoming the tricky aspects of post-corps life, like getting a new wardrobe and adjusting to a significantly higher income. Part Three also highlighted the importance of ongoing career growth beyond your service term.

And along the way you've gotten to know a few of archetypal corps members created to illustrate the key messages of this *Companion*. Below you can read where they are now.



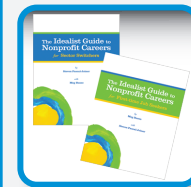
#### ACE'S STORY: EPILOGUE

Ace, the 19-year-old who served in a green energy corps, spends his first post-corps years helping to develop a new business that deconstructs buildings and resells component parts in New Orleans. As the company grows, Ace accepts fewer hours from Solar NOLA, the solar-installation organization where he apprenticed during his transition. He uses his service corps scholarship to go back to school part-time to earn an associates degree in business management.



#### BEA'S STORY: EPILOGUE

Bea, the 22-year-old who connected farms with public school cafeterias during her term, realizes that her first post-corps job at Farm Adventure isn't her dream job after all. She learns through research and informational interviews that to do what she wants to do, she needs further education. After attending an Idealist.org Graduate Degree Fair for the Public Good in North Carolina, she applies to several schools and is fully funded by one of them, where she matriculates in the fall after completing a year at Farm Adventure.



#### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

##### Chapter One of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) can help you explore the differences between the nonprofit, for-profit, and government sectors.

##### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch1.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch1.html)

##### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch1.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch1.html)

#### GRAD SCHOOL RESOURCES FROM IDEALIST

If you are trying to see how a graduate education can help you connect to your next career steps, Idealist.org offers two free resources of interest.

##### The **Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center**

contains a wealth of knowledge about graduate study (as well as alternatives to it).

[www.idealism.org/gradschool](http://www.idealism.org/gradschool)

##### **Idealist Graduate Degree Fairs**

for the Public Good take place in cities across the United States and Canada. These free events bring together a range of graduate education programs that aim to help their students make a difference.

[www.idealism.org/gradfairs](http://www.idealism.org/gradfairs)





### CESAR'S STORY: EPILOGUE

Cesar, the 33-year-old who has done two terms of service with a community center for immigrants in a faith-based service corps, moves on to a program associate role at a small, grass-roots nonprofit that provides human services to new immigrants. The organization has only three full-time staff members, so Cesar gets his wish to wear many, many hats. Ironically, he realizes that he really misses teaching, his car, Florida—feelings he did not anticipate—so he moves back to Tampa, buys an affordable used car, and goes to work in a development role for the faith-based community radio station where he used to volunteer. To fulfill his teaching yen, he volunteers nights teaching English classes for immigrants through his church.



### DEENA'S STORY: EPILOGUE

Deena, the 47-year-old who served in Ecuador connecting new small businesses with expertise and micro-loans, has moved to Phoenix. She now teaches Native American entrepreneurs about business development and helps them access micro-loans through a new social networking website that makes it possible for anyone to lend money to small Native businesses. She also spends a few years working toward her degree through a global executive MBA program. Through her service corps's affinity group for Lesbian and Gay returned volunteers, she meets Shane, who works for a micro-financing institution in Ghana. The two stay in touch and eventually, when Deena completes her degree, Shane invites her to Accra to work in micro-finance there.



### ED'S STORY: EPILOGUE

Ed, the 70-year-old college English instructor who served in China and now lives in Portland, OR, spends his first post-corps years taking care of his grandkids and working part-time teaching adult job seekers computer literacy skills. He starts a blog about using social media in the classroom. As his readership increases, a nonprofit approaches Ed about sponsoring his blog. The organization creates resources for teachers throughout the world and offers him enough income that he cuts back his teaching hours so that he has more time to blog and to be with his family. Over time he receives invitations to speak at technology and education conferences and enjoys the chance to keep traveling.



## Look inwards, then look out!

Look to your internal compass for guidance. Reading job descriptions (as you may have done for the Career Tracks Exercise—discussed in [Part One](#) of this *Companion*, as well as in *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*) can help you determine some directions to move toward in your career. While valuable, don't forget to imagine new possible paths to walk down, regardless of whether those paths yet exist. Articulating your own boundless vision of your future is a first step to making it happen, and can help you recognize the opportunities the universe presents you.

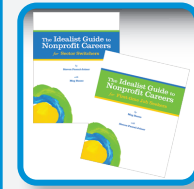
In fact, a major takeaway message of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* is that to be happy in your career, you must first know yourself and your own diverse needs, then know your sector and the people in it, and finally, to find the synergy between what you want and what the opportunities are.

## Beyond your career

The focus of this *Companion* has been on your career development. For many people, though, career isn't the driving force in their lives—and it may not be in yours. Having fun outdoors, relishing time with family, and engaging in philanthropy and hobbies outside the 9-to-5 work day may be the activities that propel you. While this *Companion* is meant to infuse you with ideas for moving on with your career, its intention is not to assume that career holds crucial importance for you, or even that it should. To the extent that you are thinking about your next steps, the suggestions detailed here are to assist your planning.

## A personal perspective from the author

My advice to think seriously about signing on for a second or third term of service comes from the heart. I committed to three terms (Peace Corps, 1998-2000; AmeriCorps National, 2000-2001; and AmeriCorps VISTA, 2004-2005) for reasons ranging from the issues I'd get to work on, to the population I'd get to work with, to the roles I'd get to play in my host organization. I loved all three terms and gained far more than I'd be able to give back in a lifetime of service. Completing three terms also meant transitioning from corps to career three different times, and I made new choices during each transition that have informed my perspective throughout this *Companion*. The best career advice I've ever received has been from my parents, who have always said that I can be *anything* I want to be. Through their words and actions, both have emphasized that since I will spend so much of my life at work, that I should always do what I love. So far that advice hasn't let me down.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Read about knowing your-

self, the sector you want to work in, and the synergy between the two in the **Conclusion** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/conclusion.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/conclusion.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/conclusion.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/conclusion.html)

### PUTTING YOUR GOOD INTENTIONS INTO ACTION

Look for **The Idealist.org Handbook to Building a Better World** at your local library. The book outlines a huge variety of ways you can make a positive impact in your community and the world, regardless of your career choices.

[www.idealists.org/handbook](http://www.idealists.org/handbook)

### FOR ONGOING CAREER SUPPORT

For ongoing career support, check out **Idealist's Career Center** ([www.idealists.org/career](http://www.idealists.org/career)), your own undergraduate career development center (whether you're in school now, or an alum), the career resources of your corps (find links at [www.idealists.org/service](http://www.idealists.org/service)), and **The New Service** blog from Idealist.org, ([www.idealists.org/thenewservice](http://www.idealists.org/thenewservice)).



## SUMMARY

As you encounter new opportunities and challenges, remember that **your service experience is a valuable source of knowledge and skills** (pages 114-115) that will remain with you for the rest of your life. Use the ideas in this book to continually evaluate your career trajectory and **stay true to your life's ambitions** (page 117). Thanks for reading—we wish you all the best in realizing your goals and potential in the future!

## You are here

- This is the **Conclusion**. The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealists.org/servicecompanion](http://www.idealists.org/servicecompanion).

### About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

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